

Illustration



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COVER ILLUSTRATION BY
GEORGE PETTY
(1894 – 1975)

Calendar pin-up for *True*, 1954

DANIEL ZIMMER
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From the Editor...

This issue features two of the greatest of the “girl artists” in illustration history—Charles Dana Gibson and George Petty.

Our story on George Petty in particular has been a long time coming. Before his death in 2006, Reid Stewart Austin had proposed a long-format article on Petty. He would gather together notes and photographs left over from his book *The Classic Pin-Up Art of George Petty* (1997), and our intention was to present as much original artwork as possible, reproductions that never made it into his original book. Unfortunately life got in the way, and one day I received the sad news that Reid had passed away.

I didn't think about Petty again until a few years later, when a friend in charge of Reid's estate sent me a large box full of material. It was a staggering collection of tearsheets and photographs, notes and letters. The story of George Petty's life in a box. It was a bit overwhelming, so I simply sat on this material for a long time, afraid to begin the process of trying to do justice to Reid's passion. I finally got up the gumption to tackle the task, and so here at last is the result—Reid's final article on one of his favorite subjects, The Petty Girl. Only a book-length treatment could truly do justice to all of his material, but I've tried to do my best. I hope you will enjoy it.

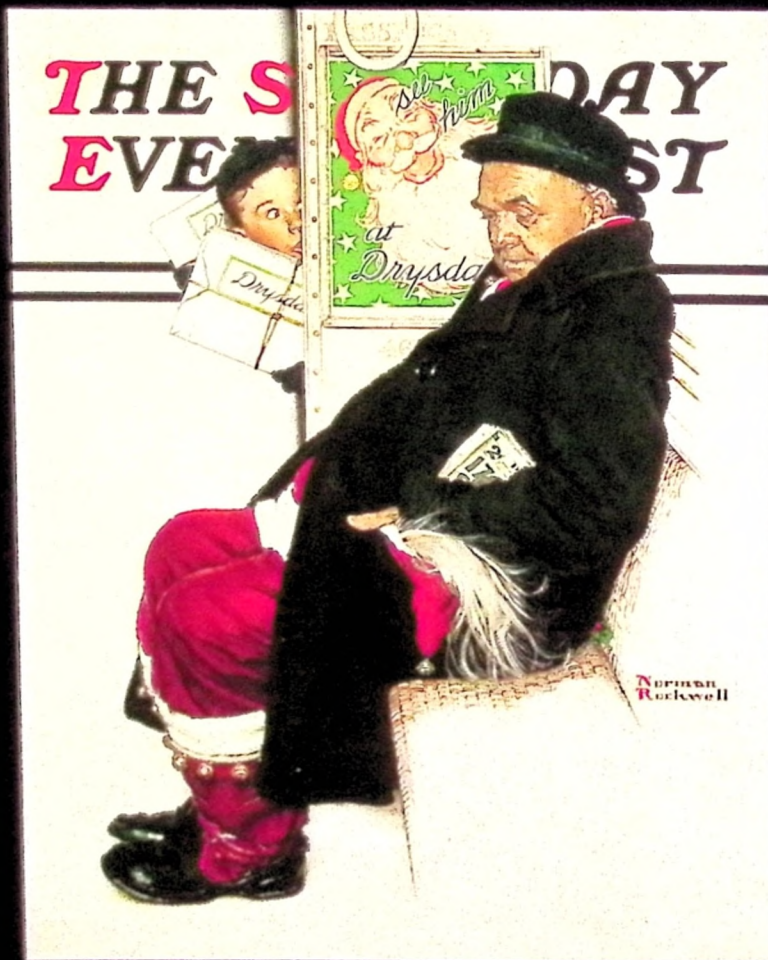
Speaking of books, as you may or may not be aware, I have recently launched a few book projects on the “crowdfunding” website called Kickstarter. My second Kickstarter project, *The Golden Age*, is available now. This new book weighs in at 224 pages, and features the work of 154 artists, with 218 full-page illustrations photographed directly from the original artwork, representing some of the greatest works created during the Golden Age of illustration. This book may be ordered through the mail directly, or from my website at www.Illustration-Magazine.com. You will find an advertisement for the new book on page 53 of this issue.

Daniel Zimmer, Publisher

the illustrated gallery

We take great pride in announcing the addition of these truly exceptional new works to our extensive collection of American illustrated art. They richly embody all the aesthetic and historical values to be found in this popular and sought after genre.

Norman Rockwell (1894-1978)



"Santa On a Train"
Cover for *The Saturday Evening Post*
December 28, 1940
Oil on Canvas, 38" x 30"

At the heart of this touching and humorous Christmas work, which appeared on the December 28, 1940 cover of *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST*, is the juxtaposition of the heads of the astonished boy holding a Drysdale package, the Drysdale poster of the store Santa in costume, and the drowsy man wearing the Santa pants and boots under his overcoat, obviously on his way home from work. Rockwell's gift as a storyteller in pictures is displayed here at its best. The simple use of predominantly three colors – red, black and white – and the omission of any extraneous detail, add to the strength of this fine example of illustration art.

Please visit www.IllustratedGallery.com to view our complete collection of over 1500 works by America's leading illustrators.

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Maxfield Parrish (1870-1966)

"The Little Peach"

Book illustration for

Poems of Childhood by Eugene Field, 1904

Oil on paper, 21" x 14.75"

This illustration by Parrish of the poem "The Little Peach" by Eugene Field, has a signature device frequently used by the painter: two figures in profile framing a central space or scene. It also contains one of his typical luminous skies above a dark, distant landscape, a style of composition originating in Renaissance portraiture. The thoughtful boy and girl are very suggestive, as is the cloudy sky. But what this suggests is withheld. Ambiguity in art is an exceptional value, and this illustration evokes it beautifully.

Elizabeth Shippen Green (1871-1954)

"The Little Gate"

Illustration for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*

Volume 130, December 1914 - May 1915

Oil on board, 24" x 16"

This charming painting of two children gazing eagerly into the garden beyond, captures the sense of adventure that the desire to explore would inspire. It is based on a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and appeared in *HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE*, Volume 130, December 1914 - May 1915. The picture is an example of the expressive use of contrast between the pastel shades of the children's clothing and the dark prison-like gates and mysterious green space beyond. It also makes use of the special expressiveness of the children's backs, an idea that leaves something to the imagination of the viewer.





Original Illustration for True, 1964. Watercolor and gouache on board, 22.5" x 15". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



George Brown Petty IV

George Petty

by Reid Stewart Austin

To the artist, exposure is success. By 1939, George Petty's "Petty Girl" could be found in newspapers, magazines, billboards, and even the movies. Few artist's creations knew such organic, un-hyped visibility. She was seen by millions. The artist professed himself "bewildered" by such public approval. One of those who saw her through rapt eyes was a 13 year old boy from the Chicago suburbs, Hugh Marston Hefner, who later said, "When she appeared on the first gatefold ever in *Esquire*, that's when I first made her acquaintance...for me she was the stuff dreams are made of." Life for Hugh, and the rest of us, would never be the same, for the sexual revolution had begun. It is quite possible that, for better or worse, had Hefner never collided—particularly head-on with the momentous unfolding of that first triple gatefold in the December 1939 issue—we would never have heard of Hugh Hefner, nor experienced the sexual uproar of the 1960s and 70s.

George Brown Petty IV was born April 27, 1894, in Abbeville, Louisiana. He was born into what has been described by historian Paul Johnson as, "the world's wealthiest country, a nation that basked in living standards unprecedented in the history of humanity." The American magazine had become the public's favorite form of entertainment, dominating the burgeoning movie business and easily coexisting with it through the first four decades of the 20th Century, until television reared its disruptive head.

Technical advances in color printing and a competitive grab for advertising dollars created demand for talented artists to give visual punch to both editorial and advertising elements of these new publications, as mass production methods fed an ever growing, eager to consume, middle class. By the 1920s, one in five Americans owned an automobile. This mobile public extended the ever-avid ad business to the alfresco spectacle of the billboard—which was to advertising what "talkies" were to Hollywood.

Into this churning sea of capitalism, George Brown Petty was launched. He would prove a most adept navigator.

THE PETTY STORY

George showed artistic talent early. His formal art education had impressive credentials: Chicago Art Institute's young student classes in 1912 and '13; Paris' Academie Julian, 1914 into '15. His foundation with the maverick airbrush preceeded this by some years, having mastered it at age 15, retouching negatives in his father's photo studio. His skill with the instrument extended to other, more novel, areas as well: "I learned to play Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever* on it quite well," he said in later life.

At the time of his father's untimely death in 1916, 22 year old George was hired by R.R. Donnelly, a large printing company where he picked up many aspects of the engraving busi-



Bubbles. A retouched photograph by George B. Petty III (George Petty's father)

FIELD QUALITY NEWS

SEASONABLE AND NOVELTY MERCHANDISE *for* IMMEDIATE RETAIL SELLING

June 1922

BURLINGTON HOSIERY

A complete line of sterling character which forms the foundation of thousands of progressive retail hosiery departments. See pages 20-21 for descriptions and prices



MARSHALL FIELD & COMPANY - CHICAGO
Manufacturers and Distributors of Standard Merchandise

Marshall Field & Company catalog cover, June 1922



Voice, February 1912



Voice, March 1912



George Petty (far right, arm raised) in Jean-Paul Laurens' class at the Académie Julien, Paris, 1914. Photo by C.J. Clarke

ness—a process that would affect his painting in the future. His abundant use of warm tones for clothing his creations resulted from this tenure, as he learned that some colors were easier to reproduce than others with the four-color printing process.

Upon his marriage to Julia (Jule) Donahue in 1918, he was hired by the ad agency Ruthrauff & Ryan, where he did everything from paste-up to lettering, with an emphasis on photo retouching, and even an occasional cover illustration for Marshall Field's fashion catalogue. In 1922 a son, George Petty V ("Boy") was born, following sister Marjorie ("Mugs"), born in 1919. By 1934, Marjorie became a working member of the family corporation as head studio cleaner-upper, idea-person, and model.

After a vain attempt to partner in a studio in 1927, George opted to go it alone, finding that split profits were no profits. By the early 1930s, he was up to his airbrush in ladies undies—his accounts fattened by stocking and girdle accounts, and most visibly, Atlas (near beer) Breweries.

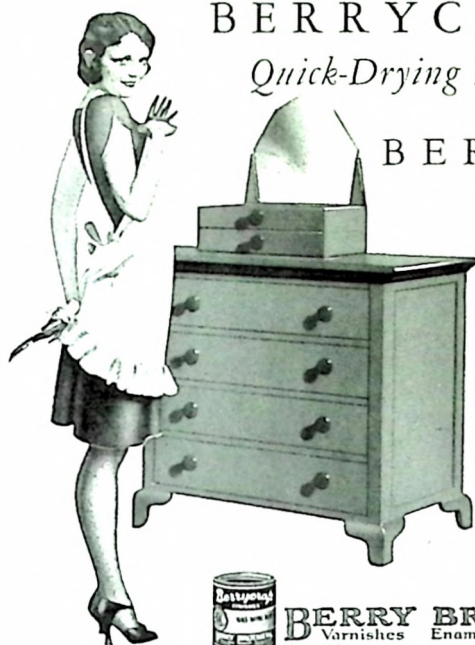
American Paint and Oil Dealer

A monthly magazine entered as second-class matter October 21, 1908, at the postoffice at St. Louis, Mo. under the Act of March 3, 1879.

BERRYCRAFT

Quick-Drying Enamel

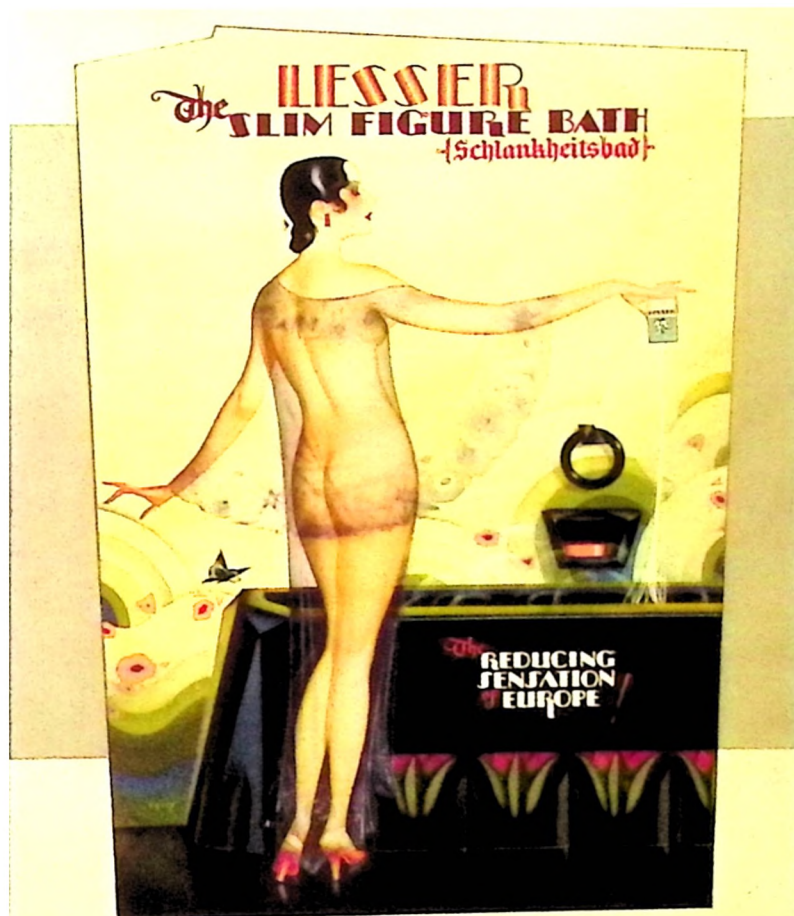
BERRY'S
best seller



Repeat orders from dealers everywhere indicate that Berrycraft Quick-Drying Enamel is one of the fastest selling finishes Berry Brothers has ever made. This amazing new enamel flows smoothly, brushes out easily and dries to recast in four hours. Its odor is not unpleasant, it is water-proof and it wears. Prepare now to satisfy certain demand for this amazing, new finish. Write for information.

BERRY BROTHERS
Varnishes Enamels Lacquers
Detroit Michigan

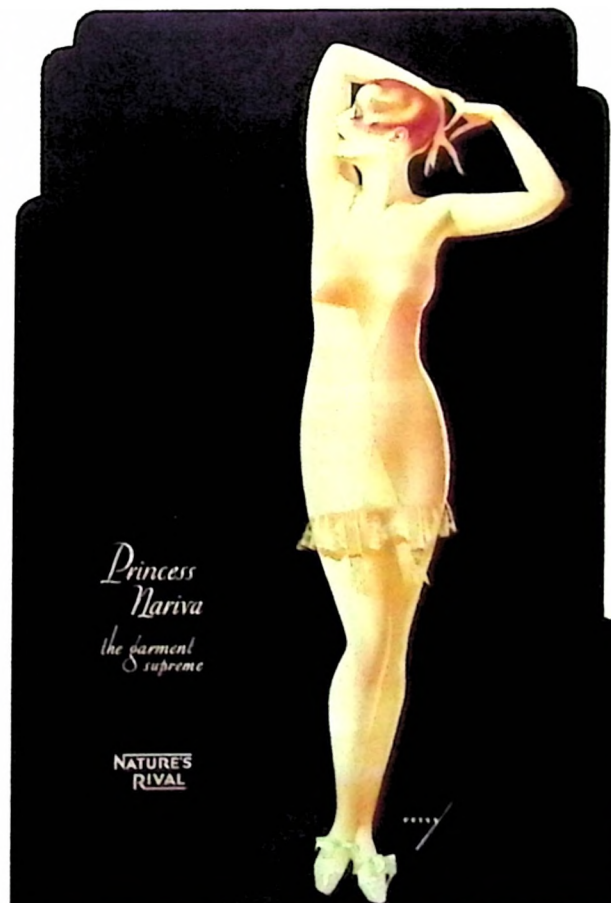
An advertisement for Berrycraft Enamel, June 1929



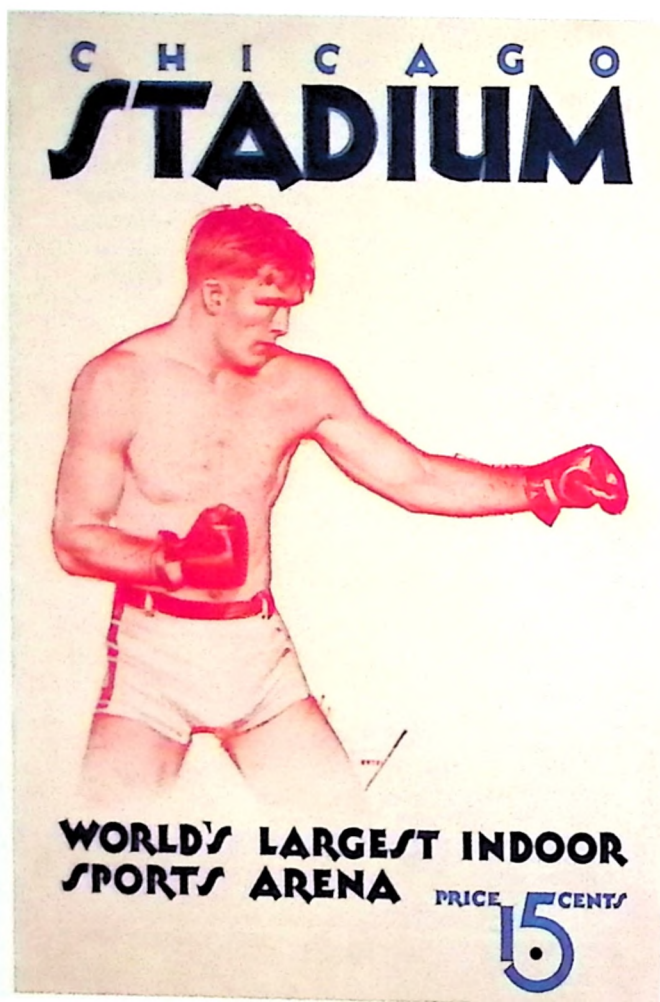
An advertisement for Lesser Slim Figure Bath, 1929



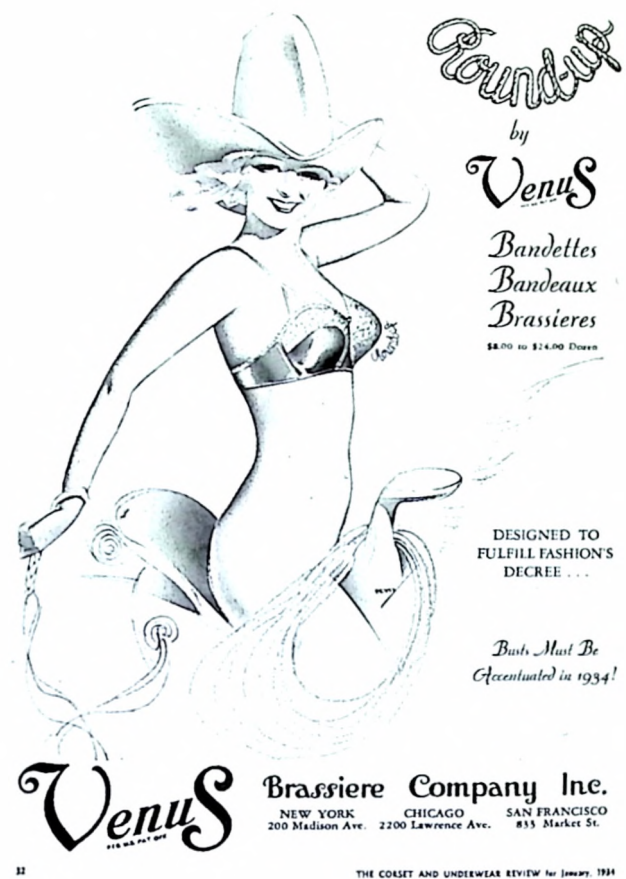
A window display at Walgreens Drugstore in Chicago, 1929



An advertisement for Nature's Rival Garments, 1929



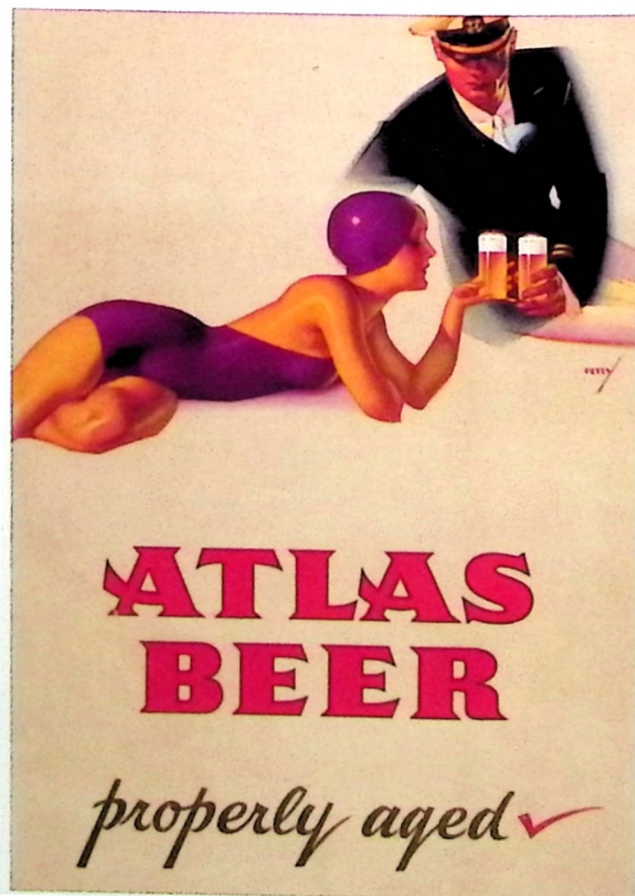
Chicago Stadium program cover, 1932



Ad for Venus Brassiere Co., *The Corset and Underwear Review*, January 1934



Ad for Quaker Lace Co., *The Underwear and Hosiery Review*, October 1941



Poster for Atlas Beer, 1930



Illustration for Atlas Beer advertisement, 1930. Gouache and watercolor on board, 10.75" x 12". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



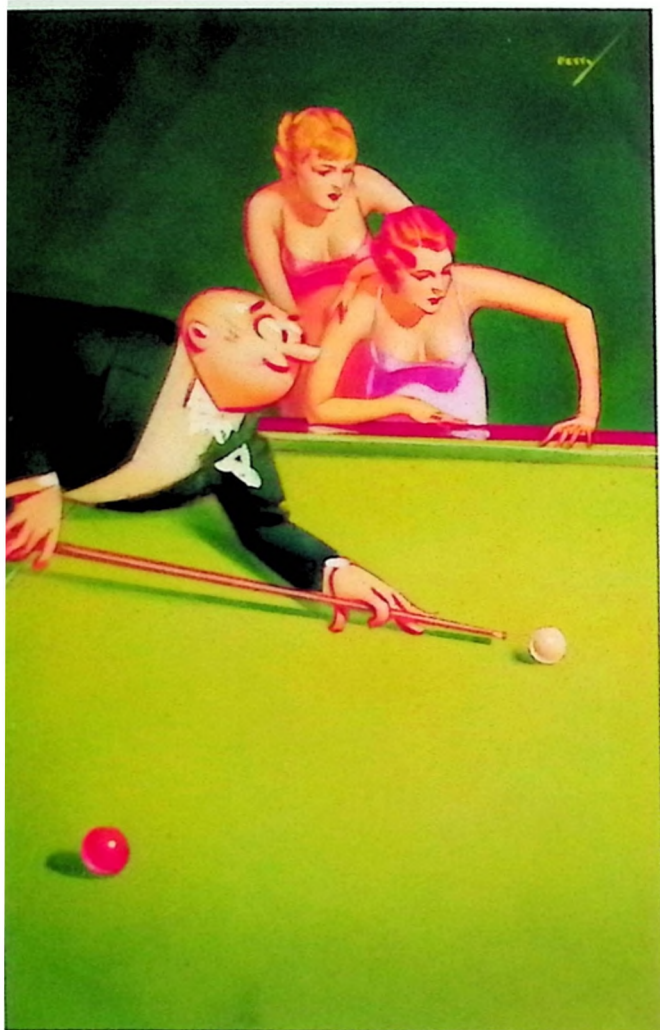
Ad for Atlas Beer, May 18, 1930



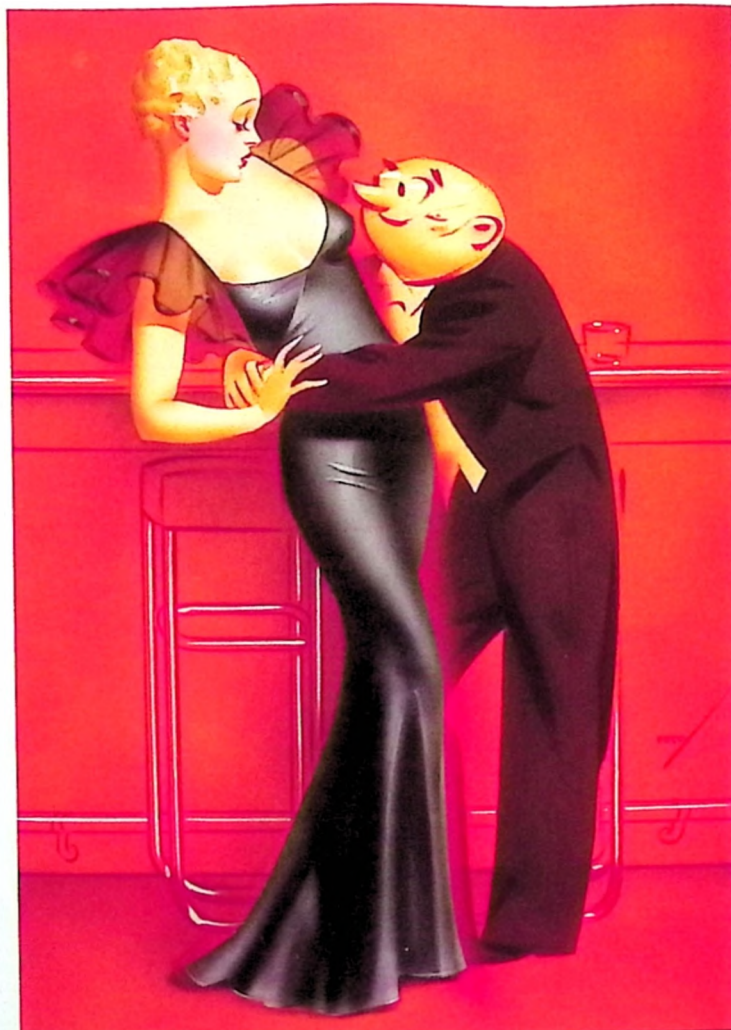
Ad for Atlas Beer, May 10, 1931



Ad for Atlas Beer, 1931



Original illustration for *Esquire*, c. 1930s. Watercolor and gouache, 11.5" x 7.75"
Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration for *Esquire*, May 1934. Watercolor and gouache, 11.5" x 7.75"
Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

Though not the national account the ambitious artist sought, it did offer maximum exposure in everything from newspapers, counter cards, and billboards all over the South and Midwest. When those billboards caught the eye of Arnold Gingrich in the summer of 1933, George Petty was assured a very promising future.

In early 1933—while Roosevelt closed banks, Prohibition was repealed, and the nation was shrouded in gloom—David Smart, dapper publisher of *Apparel Arts*, an elegant and successful men's fashion magazine, and his erudite editor, Arnold Gingrich, were assembling the dummy for a unique venture—an elegant, literate, and humorous men's magazine to be called *Esquire*. When the budget suddenly allowed for 12 additional color pages, and it was realized that devoting them to more fashion plates wouldn't work, an anxious search for additional cartoonists resulted. At that point George Petty walked in.

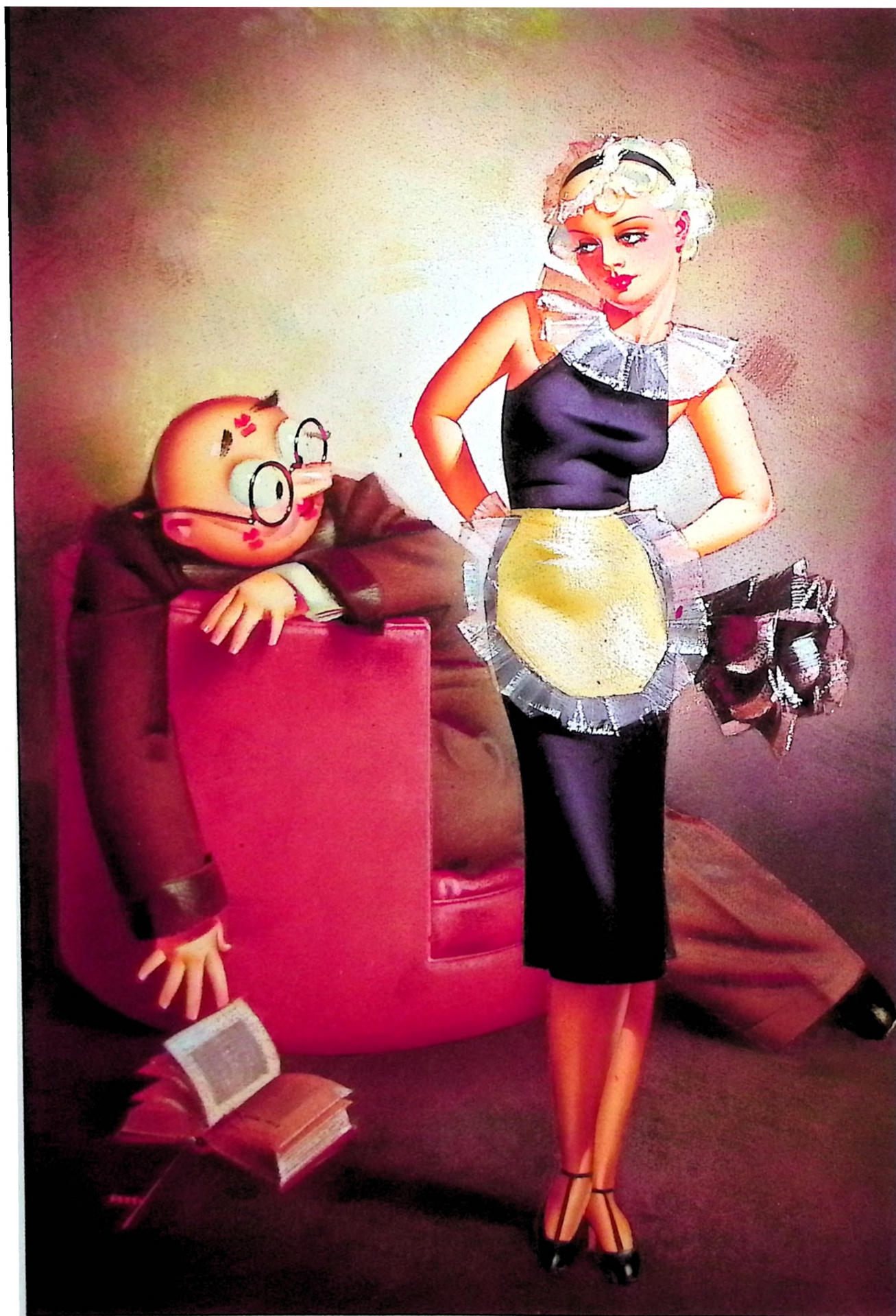
A friend kept dinging George: "Charlie Davis nagged at me until I went. They were operating on a shoestring—Arnold wrote me a personal check for the first drawings—\$25 each. I told him they wouldn't be funny." Gingrich waved that away and handed him a sheaf of cartoon roughs done by the talented and prolific E. Simms Campbell. To everyone's surprised pleasure, *Esquire* took off. The first issue of 105,000 copies sold out. Within two years circulation shot to 600,000 a month.

While perhaps hard to understand today, the airbrushed perfection of Petty's art deco creations was no less revolutionary than the Talon trouser zipper advertised in those early issues. It is worth noting that although George's work appeared in only six of those first 12 issues, his popularity zoomed and was made manifest by a hugely popular ad series for Old Gold cigarettes that began in early 1935—appearing in *Esquire*, *The New Yorker*, and sports programs and newspapers nationwide. Reflecting this, in 1936, *Esquire*—in answer to popular demand—offered a deluxe, spiral bound Petty Portfolio containing 24 cartoons. A second printing was issued in 1937.

George's run of a magic mix of good luck and good management actually began the previous winter. In response to samples submitted in the autumn of 1933, he secured a lucrative contract with Jantzen Knitting Mills—a 1935 billboard, and subsequently all of their major print advertising. Within a matter of months, George had captured two national accounts that would catapult him among the most visible, highly paid American illustrators. It was as though the Depression that continued to oppress the country never existed. Over the next half-dozen years he would attract one-shot clients that included Pontiac Motors, Pepsi Cola, 20th Century Fox, Time magazine, TWA, Brown & Bigelow, Acme Beer, Warner Bros., Quaker Stockings, and Bauer & Black, among others.



Original Illustration for *Esquire*, c. 1930s. Watercolor and gouache, 17" x 12". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration for *Esquire*, c. 1930s. Watercolor and gouache, 25.75" x 17.25". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration for *Esquire*, c. 1930s. Watercolor and gouache, 26" x 19.5". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration for *Equipe*, 1937. Watercolor and gouache, 17.25" x 11.75". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration for *Esquire*, c. 1930s. Watercolor and gouache, 17.25" x 11.75"



Original illustration for *Esquire*, c. 1930s. Watercolor and gouache, 18" x 12". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original Illustration for *Esquire*, September 1934. Watercolor and gouache, 17.5" x 11.75". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Advertisement for Old Gold Cigarettes, January 26, 1935

While the Old Gold series successfully perpetuated the “old-duffer-ogling-a-pretty-girl” theme of the first *Esquire* cartoons, the cartoons themselves evolved dramatically. One day David Smart casually observed to Gingrich, “Get rid of the duffer and you’ve got something.” Smart had *no* idea.

The March ’35 issue would see the duffer ditched; July would see all the background props jettisoned, leaving the Girl gloriously alone against a white background—invariably holding a telephone to facilitate writing gag lines. The Petty Girl concept, while not quite achieved, was born.

Through all this, George’s great love and leveler was hunting, a passion inherited from his father who was said to trim dead limbs from tall trees with a single shot. George’s increasing income allowed him the luxury of jaunts he previously only dreamed of. In addition to his usual, domestic hunts, in 1936 he took the first of three expeditions to hunt the great bears of Kodiak Island. This particular trip was chosen over the opportunity to appear in the Warner Bros. film *Artists and Models*, along with a number of other top illustrators, which Jule Petty had hoped would mean a paid California vacation. His most elaborate hunt lay ahead in 1938—two months in Kenya—two months that would exacerbate his rapidly increasing work load—but more on that later.

Old Gold signed George for a series that would prove catalyst to defining the Petty Girl. The series of illustrations debuted in early 1938, and lasted into the mid-1940s, dropping the old



Advertisement for Old Gold Cigarettes, November 7, 1936

man business and concentrating on what obviously, by this time, mattered the most—the Girl. Petty’s take on femininity necessarily changed, from the *Esquire* woman of questionable character and scant attire to the girl next door; from Harlow to Grable. This era of Petty Girl art is among George’s finest.

Petty was eagerly embraced by Madison Avenue. Most other artists who specialized in “girlie” illustrations on pulp magazine covers and on calendars were discouraged from signing their more mainstream ad artwork—while Petty was hired specifically for his name. Indeed, Old Gold coined the name Betty Petty, and offered reproductions of their ads sans advertising copy. In 1940, they introduced the first Petty Girl calendar and playing cards. Paramount Pictures, in 1939’s *Man About Town*, in addition to a heavily promoted Petty ad campaign, gave Betty Grable and a chorus of harem girls a production number (lyric by a young Frank Loesser) that sang the praises of “...that brilliant young artist—George Petty!... That subtle designer of feminine charm—George Petty!” Unfortunately this homage was cut, leaving a mysteriously wordless series of closeups of veiled and smiling blondes under walls emblazoned with the Petty signature. It was also a year of unsolicited accolades. Princeton’s class of ’39 voted George their favorite artist, and *Life* magazine’s June 26, 1939 issue devoted four pages headlined, “The Petty Girl, Triumph of Airbrush, is Feminine Ideal of American Men.” Nowadays this would be like a week’s exposure on the Today Show.



Illustration 19



Original Illustration for Old Gold Cigarettes, 1936. Watercolor and gouache



Original Illustration for Old Gold Cigarettes, 1936. Watercolor and gouache

To some extent, the Petty Girl's broad acceptance is explained by *Esquire's* prestige—its cache of literary excellence: Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, etc.—which paved its way into the living rooms of America, where Petty's creation was discovered by the whole family. Most other artists who dealt in "girlie" or calendar art (the word "pinup" originated in England and wouldn't find general usage in the States until 1942) found their audience limited to the male-dominant customers of garages, barbershops, tobacco shops, and such.

Great success means hard work. By 1938, George's workload was immense. At one point that year, "...when I got down with a bad case of jitters over closing dates, Mama was smart enough to know that I'd soon be cutting out paper dolls unless I got away from deadlines...and I'd had a yen to hunt African game..." Yen understates the issue. George was determined to experience this greatest of hunting challenges. Six weeks was deemed necessary to accomplish the complexities of such an undertaking—plus two weeks allowed for travel to and from East Africa. Even working ahead, fulfilling two or three months of deadlines while physically preparing for such an ordeal (studying animal anatomy and miles of walking, fully backpacked, among other things) one can only ponder ignoring the potential pandemonium upon return. Existing

photos of the hunt show a man totally at ease and clearly having the time of his life.

Two things indicated resulting hazards of two months off: An interoffice memo from Gingrich's secretary, Helene Richards, dated 9/17/38: "Mr. Petty will sail on the S.S. Paris from Southampton 9/24 and dock at NY 10/1—the Old Gold gag is being sent to him at NY so he can work out the drawing in his mind and meet the 10/10 deadline." So much for six restful weeks trudging the wilds of Africa. Then, interoffice materials indicate that Richards' job of dogging Petty re: gags and deadlines goes into full gear post-Africa, with George falling steadily behind in delivery, until by November into December of 1939, after dogging him re: the March, 1940 art, on December 26 we find the scribbled note, "Petty in hospital."

No matter how ominous that sounds, the family remembers nothing, and all indications are that work for Old Gold, Jantzen, and others flowed like a January Thaw. In fact, some of his best work was done over the winter and spring of 1940. Whether deadlines were being met we're not so sure.

We know, to David Smart's fury, *Esquire's* weren't. The Petty Girl would be missing from the magazine for the balance of 1940. The special gatefolds that were being rushed into the magazine, beginning with the April issue, especially for



Petty on safari in Africa, 1938



Original Illustration for Brown & Bigelow Calendar Co., 1938. Watercolor and gouache on board, 32" x 24". Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY



Original advertising illustration, c. 1930s. Watercolor and gouache on board, 19.5" x 29.5". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

the Petty Girl, would go Pettyless. Smart started rumors with his inclusion of a boxed notice in the March issue runover: "George Petty couldn't contribute to this issue through illness induced by overwork. He will try to be back with another drawing next month." (Smart would apparently be less subtle in a September *Newsweek* interview touting the "Varga" Girl's *Esquire* debut, resulting in *Newsweek*'s bald statement that the Petty Girl had not appeared since the February issue, "... because her creator suffered a nervous breakdown last winter...") The family's memory of an "angry" father around this time very likely stemmed from this September incident.

At this point the issue of money should be explored: For the bulk of his *Esquire* tenure, George received \$100 a page. Only with the December '39 gatefold did that rate go to \$500 a page, and then only at George's persistent urging. Under both rates he got the original back with the magazine getting only repro rights. Existing letters indicate Smart bending over backwards to keep the status quo—praising George for submissions that generally were a shadow of work delivered to Old Gold or Jantzen—of course he was pulling down two grand or better from each of these accounts. It is our belief that under the abrupt note, "Petty in hospital" lay a good deal of heavy financial breathing. Believing he had made Petty, Smart balked at giving in to his demands, considering him ungrateful. Yet, with US involvement in the European war inevitable, a khaki-clad *Esquire* without its star attraction was unthinkable. We may assume that the gloves came off in January 1940. George

was well aware he had the upper hand, as were Gingrich (who was firmly, if silently, on George's side) and Smart.

While details are sketchy, it is known that an agreement with *Esquire* was hammered out in the winter of 1940, guaranteeing George \$1,850 per "drawing" for the twelve months of 1941. *Esquire* would own the art, but couldn't reprint it without renegotiation, whereas George could resell rights to anyone except a competing magazine (there were no competing magazines at the time). It was a lopsided, through-the-looking-glass arrangement that demonstrated just how vital the Petty Girl was to the magazine—*Esquire* was essentially babysitting the paintings. Petty's demands surely vexed David Smart, who wouldn't even attend negotiations, leaving that onerous task to Arnold Gingrich. Migraine-prone Smart had a terrible, terrible headache. Then, one sunny day in June, at the time the Germans were occupying Paris, a diminutive, painfully humble, out-of-work Peruvian artist named Alberto Vargas hesitantly entered *Esquire*'s New York offices, portfolio and hat in hand—a living antidote to Smart's migraines.

Within the week, a non-plussed Vargas was hustled to Chicago, set up at the Drake hotel, put under contract (with no limit on the amount of work required) at \$75 a week for three years (he asked for \$100), and hard at work attempting to please an impatient "Uncle Dave" Smart by producing the first "Varga" Girl. His name was shortened with no argument and subsequently patented by *Esquire* in a move guaranteed to prevent this artist from ever biting the hand that fed him.



Original illustration for Jantzen Swimwear, 1939. Watercolor and gouache on board, 18.25" x 9.5"



Original Illustration for Jantzen Swimwear, "The Petty Girl Suit of 1940."
Watercolor and gouache on board, 23.5" x 18.5"

Unfortunately he did not change his name legally.

1940 was fraught on a number of other levels. Paradoxically, Jantzen's enormously successful, "Petty Girl Suit of 1940" campaign, which capitalized totally on the artist and for which George got his highest price, \$2000 (and he got the original back), would prove to be his last. Greg Millet, who was with Jantzen from 1935 to 1940, recalled George being dropped because, "...Petty's price increased steadily and he was often very late delivering art scheduled under non-cancelable space contracts—the latter was very much a problem at times."

Thanks to Elizabeth Eyerly, who had the Jantzen account at the time, we know other, under-the-counter forces were at work. She attended a meeting in Smart's office in the late summer of 1940, at which Jantzen executives were inundated with fast-talking rhetoric regarding *Esquire's* brilliant new, highly publicized artist Varga, and urged to give thought to using him for their 1941 advertising—the entire scheme greased by the offer of free Varga artwork for Jantzen's new suntan oil. Eyerly was appalled at the whole idea while Jantzen execs were enchanted. That the 1941 Jantzen/Varga campaign was ultimately a dismal flop was of little matter to David Smart.

The Old Gold series coming to an end that same summer of 1940 may be less coincidence than it appears. While George was well paid (\$2500 per illustration; in today's terms almost \$30,000) his deal with Old Gold included their ownership of the paintings. Being so acutely aware of the resale potential of his work, it would not have been lost on him that here were over two dozen potentially valuable pieces, the best work he'd done, resale rights for which were lost to him. His new arrangement with *Esquire* gave him financial security (without the demanding workload he'd been under for two years) particularly the vitally important second, third, and often fourth resale rights he needed. And, no small matter, the fact that at *Esquire* there was an almost total lack of art direction. Though there is no record, we believe George happily acquiesced to corporate decision to end the Old Gold series, or very possibly instigated the end himself. In any event, aside from a number of one-shot clients, all of his eggs were now tucked firmly in *Esquire's* basket and the Petty Girl was on an unstoppable roll.

The Petty Girl sailed into 1941 on a flood-tide of popularity rarely equaled. In retrospect this may be seen as the apex of the artist's success. George had the lead gatefold with Varga conveniently buried further back on his own. Each monthly gatefold was offered framed and laminated, and in autumn the Petty Datebook, a compendium of past images, enjoyed great success. George's major accounts in 1941 were TWA, Ice Capades, and Airman Shirts. Most unlikely, *Time* magazine, in a break with its usual poker-stiff head and shoulders cover portraits, commissioned an energetically sexy image of Rita Hayworth which received letters of elation and condemnation in equal proportion.

Despite his initial teeth-gnashing at Smart's determined promotion of Varga (Smart appropriated two Old Gold



Original Illustration for Jantzen Swimwear, 1939. Watercolor and gouache on board, 22.5" x 18". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com
 INSET: Billboard Illustrations for Jantzen Swimwear, c. late-1930s



Time, November 10, 1941



WAVES/SPARS recruitment poster. Chicago Tribune ad, April 6, 1943

ideas with the introduction of the Varga playing cards and the wildly successful Varga Calendar) he came to accept that, with the December '41 issue, Varga was in and he was out. The pressure was off. The hunting was good. He was able to relax for the first time in a long time, but not too relaxed. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and full mobilization, George jumped in with both feet, autographing proofs in answer to many military requests. He also created at least three known recruitment posters, only one of which, for the WAVES/SPARS, is certain to have been used.

In 1942, negotiations with RKO Pictures for a film to be called *The Petty Girl*, were finalized. Also, perhaps the most left-field and meaningful salute to any artist's popularity was proclaimed amid war news on the front page of the June 6 *Chicago Daily News*: OLD MASTERS LOSE ROUND TO PETTY GIRL. Further reading revealed that under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, 3,733 Chicago area high school students were involved in a three-year program on art appreciation, "...studying such matters as color, technique, texture and composition...Instructors have pointed out all the fine points of the greatest paintings in Chicago's venerable Art Institute..." Upon completion, the students were quizzed as to their favorite artists. Tabulated

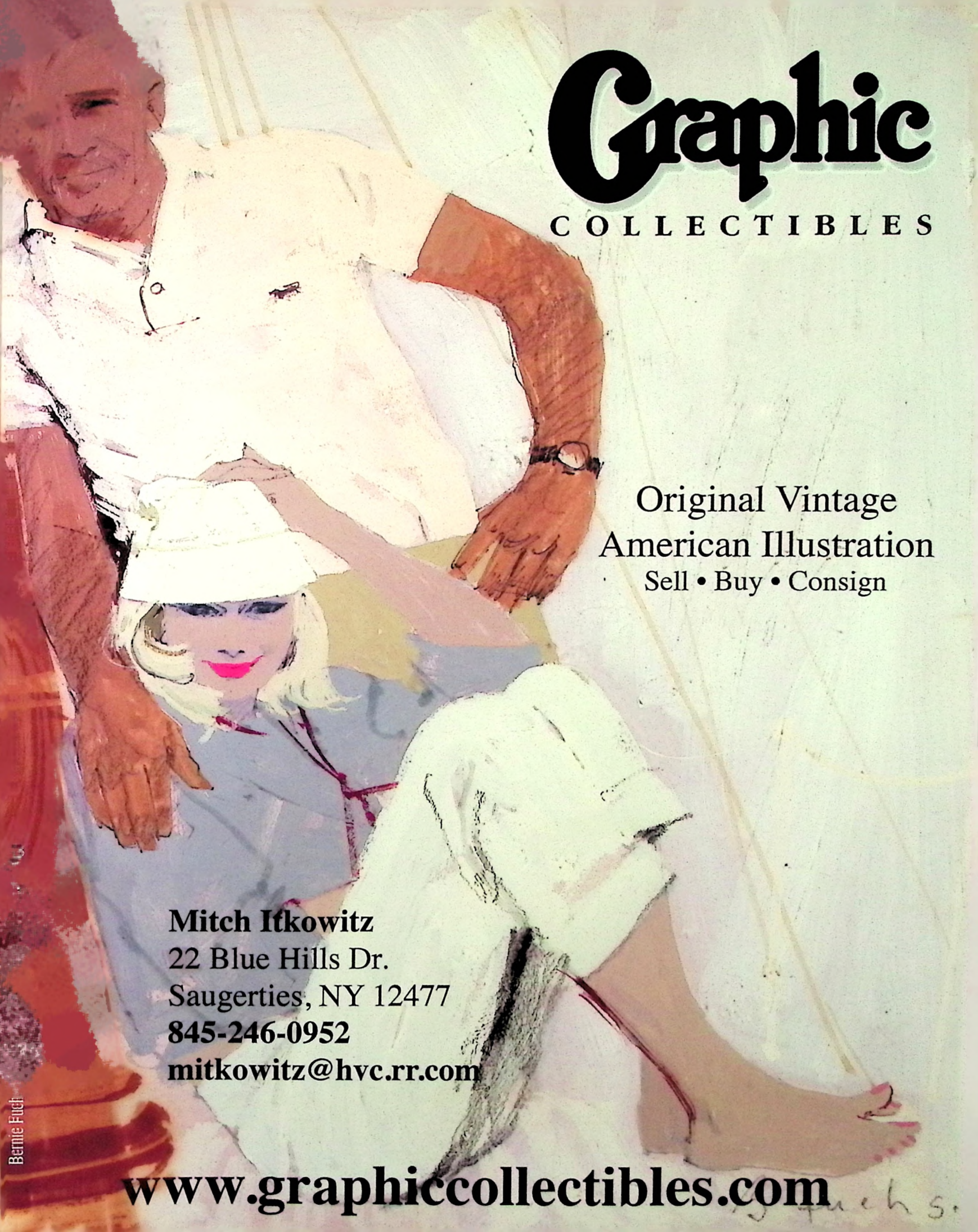


Petty presents his art to the Navy, 1943

results disclosed that George had won. Needless to say, he wasn't on the list. So, it came to pass that a Petty Girl hung among the Masters in the Chicago Art Institute. Many years later George recalled, "There I was with Rembrandt and all those other second-best guys—you couldn't speak to me for a week after that."

George's major clients in the early '40s were Bestform Foundations and MGM Studios, for which he did six widely seen and promoted images. He licensed out a line of neckties and offered his own Petty Portfolio of four prints—three from the 1941 *Esquire* series. He belonged to a number of sports clubs, including Los Rancheros Vistadores, and the

Adventurers Club, and hunted often domestically, since war-time restrictions now made out-of-country trips difficult if not impossible. On one of these trips his hunting companion was Wm. "Buzz" Fawcett, Midwestern-bred scion of Wm. Fawcett Sr., better known as Captain Billy, creator of *Capt. Billy's Whiz Bang*, the forerunner of today's comic book and basis of the Fawcett publishing empire of which "Buzz" was President. As it turned out, Fawcett was planning to revamp their *True* magazine from a hairy-chested adventure pulp into a less hirsute, family-man oriented book aimed at capturing the returning military. Fawcett knew that the Petty Girl was the



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Poster for Ice-Capades of 1943



Original illustration for Ice-Capades poster, 1944. Watercolor and gouache on board. INSET: Poster for Ice-Capades of 1946



Original illustration for *True* calendar (December), 1947. Watercolor and gouache on board

avored fantasy of many about-to-be-discharged servicemen. Subsequently, a contract was signed for one painting a month for three years, at \$2,500 per, to begin with the January 1945 issue. (And he got the originals back.) Throughout this tenure, the Fawcett brothers and George continued to share the occasional hunt.

As with his reentry into *Esquire* in January 1941, George came in sideways. Both initial forays were puzzling in that they were voluminously gowned, only brimming bare shoulders hinting at the flesh, and those famous Petty legs buried beneath. As the year progressed those famous legs, now revealed, grew to obsessive proportions, causing a public outcry that was abetted by helpless editors eager to make them public in the magazine's letters column:

Sirs: I like Petty's pictures OK, but Miss Pixie had legs like streamlined crossties.

Sirs: Why, oh why! must he put draft-horse legs on a pony chassis?

Sirs: At last we know why there's a meat shortage. Petty used the August and September quota to round out his girl's calves and ankles... get in the groove, boy, or we'll start looking our wives over again.

The message got through, for at least five of the pieces in question were surgically edited before being reproduced on subsequent calendars, with legs being reduced by as little as

3/16ths of an inch and as much as a 1/2 inch. Thereafter, beginning with the February '46 issue, the Petty Girl's legs lost considerable breadth while maintaining their famous length. As Wilford-Smith points out, "In an age of leg men, George was the ultimate leg man. He probably wasn't even aware of this self-indulgence." This example of through-the-back-door editorial manipulation relates to the art direction, or lack of same, that George received.

In the '30s, *Esquire* had no A.D. per se—its rigid page layout required little design augmentation. George was supplied with gag lines or roughs supplied by Smart or Gingrich that he followed or not as it suited him. His ad work was generally heavily art directed. The art director at *True* was (typically) used to dealing with conventional, foursquare illustrators who were illustrating a text—"Put the Indians over there." Petty didn't fit this category. Like the 500 pound gorilla, he did as he pleased; not through any arrogance, it's just the way it was. No one could imagine telling him to "Make the dress blue," or "Fix her foot," or "Make her a redhead." Interestingly enough, David Smart was directing the dickens out of Vargas, at least initially, and pinup men and women at Brown & Bigelow Calendar Co. were towing the art directed mark. Even when Petty returned to *Esquire* in 1954, the then A.D., the redoubtable Henry Wolf, who would normally have direct input into all graphic matters, to our knowledge had little if anything to say about Petty's work, which at that point could really have used a little artistic TLC.



SPORTSMAN LANDING TROUT
Frank E. Schoonover

Oil on canvas; 34" x 24"; 1913

Cover; *The Popular Magazine*
June, 1913

Cover; *Sporting Classics*
May - June, 2009

548 in the *Catalogue Raisonné*



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Original Illustration. Watercolor and gouache on board (detail)



Original illustration. Watercolor and gouache on board



Original illustration for *True*, October 1946. Watercolor and gouache on board, 25" x 19.5"



Original illustration for *True* calendar (July), 1947. Watercolor and gouache on board



Original illustration for *True*, January 1947. Watercolor and gouache on board



Original illustration for *True*. Watercolor and gouache on board



Original illustration. Watercolor and gouache, 19" x 10". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com. INSET: Reference photograph

She's
Gorgeous
in
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COLUMBIA PICTURES
presents

The Petty Girl

ROBERT CUMMINGS ★ JOAN CAULFIELD
starring

and introducing
**THE 12 GLAMOROUS
PETTY GIRLS**

with Elsa Lanchester ·
Screen Play by Nat Perrin · Music by Harold
Produced by NAT PERRIN · Directed by



Lobby card for *The Petty Girl*, 1949. INSET: Publicity still featuring Joan Caulfield and George Petty

All in all, the *True* work was the best work since the Old Gold series—technically proficient and generally exhibiting his strong sense of design and composition. It came to an end with the December 1947 issue. (*True* tried keeping the pinup gatefold alive by having Bradshaw Crandell take up the slot, but the readers just weren't interested.)

Meanwhile, as though life were as carefully planned as an ocean cruise, Columbia pictures scheduled the long-delayed *Petty Girl* film. After RKO contracted for *The Petty Girl* in '42, Howard Hughes bought the studio and sold off most of their planned properties. Columbia got *The Petty Girl* and as early as 1947 Ann Miller was announced to star. Ann opted for marriage and pregnancy, followed by miscarriage and divorce, instead, and by 1949 Joan Caulfield had the part, co-starring with Robert Cummings as George. By this time Marjorie and George Jr. left the nest and married, living their own lives, and George was at liberty, so to speak. Hollywood was just the diversion George and Jule needed. Publicity shots of him posing Caulfield indicate clearly that George was having the time of his life. Also, at a time when the *Petty Girl* might have died of lack of exposure, the film, while "...no great shakes..." as George put it, did remind everyone that she was still very much alive. (Incidentally, the portrait of Caulfield done to advertise the film showed her in bathing suit and, what else?, ballet shoes.) *The Petty Girl* remains the

only film referential to an American illustrator.

Throughout the 1930s, at the same time Buckminster Fuller, Norman Bel Geddes, and Raymond Loewy were streamlining everything from trains to teapots, Petty was determinedly engaged in streamlining the human body. It was a process that reached its questionable apex in 1956. When George was hot, his designs were stunning in their energy. Tangenting components, often of the most subtle kind, produced a sense of tension, of stilled motion, even in repose. With his discovery of the ballet shoe in 1946, his creation achieved lift-off. While never troubled by that artistic *bête noir*, the hand, feet were another, often mystifying, matter. There is no doubt that he could draw a credible foot, as can be seen in any number of images from the '30s, but as the '40s approached and his stylization of the figure grew ever more idiosyncratic, feet for whatever reason were occasionally to be wrestled with. The adoption of the ballet shoe, at some cost to reality and sexuality, banished the foot's intractable anchoring and achieved maximum thrust.

Commissions came in from General Motors for two different "Flying Lady" hood ornaments, and from the Ridge Tool Co. for 1952 and '53 calendars, both of which would feature ladies in fanciful costumes, entwined with or reclining upon industrial machines and tools—in ballet shoes. And because of the theatrical eroticism of the whole concept, they worked.



Hood ornament for Nash Ambassador, 1954

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Illustration by Robert McGinnis
Cosmopolitan magazine 1971

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Original illustration for Ridge Tool Company calendar, 1952-1953. Watercolor and gouache, 17" x 14". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original Illustration for *Esquire* calendar (July), 1956. Watercolor and gouache, 13" x 15"

In 1952, the same Helene Richards who had been watchdog over George's meeting schedule dates back in 1939, advised Arnold Gingrich that George had called to see if he could "patch up" differences with David Smart and perhaps resume relations. "I discussed the matter with Dave, who wasn't at all interested—I am passing this along so you will know that Petty, at that time, was receptive, should you have any interest in him as a contributor."

David Smart's death in the interim opened up this possibility, which Gingrich pursued immediately. Discussions led to George getting the '55 and '56 calendar assignments and sent logic flying right out the window. We here today are hard pressed to understand what Gingrich or Wolf or anyone at *Esquire* might have made of George submitting a girl in an inner tube-wearing ballet shoes; a country girl in cutoff overalls, straw hat and fishing pole going fishing—en pointe; a cowgirl, in vest, gun belt and holster, strumming a bass violin cowhide ballet shoes. Today, with the weirdo visuals so accessible daily on television and in films, we might accept this idiosyncrasy without hesitation, but people in the '50s were far more literal in their perceptions. More perplexing, what could the artist be thinking of when he depicts a girl going off to bed, holding a candle, wearing a very fetching, sheer nightie—in ballet shoes? We can only wonder. Ernest Chiriaka had most recently done a splendid job on the calendar, one in a lengthy line of other artists, and his calendar sales showed a "...steady slow downtrend in this field since the immediate postwar period." George's figures were even worse. Under the

circumstances it's hard to know whether it was the art or the times. We suspect a little of both. Nevertheless, in 1956 Decca Records bought the rights to a bunch of the *Esquire* pieces, for use on album sleeves. The Reese Co. uses Petty images on boxer shorts and pajamas in 1959. George to all intents and purposes retired. But wait—business is business, friends are friends. Old differences are patched up. That same year, the first Ice Capades art since a falling out with owner John Harris in 1947, is commissioned for the 1960 edition. George would also do the art for four more editions, which would be interrupted by tragedy.

The Petty's had relocated to Scottsdale, Arizona in 1954. It was a leisurely life punctuated by small dramas, such as George's falling from a ladder during roof repairs and breaking his arm. Since Jule couldn't drive, George drove himself to the hospital—one armed. Life was otherwise quiet, dotted with visits to and from California where the children had located—George Jr. and wife Evie in L.A., and Marjorie and husband Colin in Los Altos. Setting out early one dark December morning for a California Christmas, the trunk loaded with baked goods and bright packages, they were broadsided by an erratically speeding car. Both were unconscious, only to be roused by the ambulance siren. George had struck his head, but no concussion. Though bruised and limping, nothing was broken. Jule wasn't so lucky. At the Glendale, Arizona hospital she required forty stitches in her forehead. Her nose was broken and four ribs and her left wrist were fractured. Her legs were black with bruises.



Original illustration for *Esquire* calendar (December), 1956. Watercolor and gouache, 13" x 15"

Anxiety short-circuited the holiday glow in Los Altos and Los Angeles, calmed only by the slow improvement of both parents. George was released to his son's care after three weeks. Marjorie called her mother every day. On January 14th, the day after her father arrived in Los Angeles. Jule was cheerful, looking forward to her imminent release. An hour later George Jr. called—the hospital had just advised him of their mother's death of a pulmonary embolism. "Marj and Colin flew down from Los Altos unknown to Pop. We went to his bedroom first thing next morning. I sat down and started...before much came out I started to cry. He knew immediately and all of us cried like babies. He just kept saying, 'Why wasn't it me?'"

George returned to Scottsdale and managed to hold on for three intensely lonely months, finally returning to California and relocating in a retirement complex, Hacienda Carmel, in Carmel. That summer George's beloved sister Bess died. In the fall of 1962 he met and swiftly married widow and fellow resident Elizabeth Hetzler. The wire services picked this up as the first marriage between persons over fifty-five on the Monterey Peninsula—they were the only ones to find the marriage anything less than a disaster. The family thought the action too soon, too sudden. It took some time to convince George that this was the not uncommon move of a man stricken with irreparable loss and loneliness. Once the sense of this sunk in, to a general sigh of relief, George and Elizabeth agreed and lost little time in annulling the marriage.

That George was not to be denied romance and companionship was evident from the following 1964 newspaper squib: "Petaluma, California: A shipboard romance and a November wedding bring a storybook touch to the retirement of Mrs. Gladys Wallin, city clerk, after more than forty years of service...she will marry George Petty, famous as the creator of the Petty Girls." Gladys charmed not only George, but the family as well. For four years the Petty's enjoyed the social atmosphere of the Monterey peninsula and an occasional cruise until Gladys died in 1969 after a lingering illness. She left a husband able only to skim the depths of death; a man simply stunned by its relentlessness. With no little effort George regained his elasticity and began running between Los Altos and Los Angeles, and squiring various ladies at the Hacienda, scaring them to death with his devil-may-care driving skills. Marriage was not on his mind.

A series of mild heart attacks had plagued George since the late '60s. On one occasion in 1970 he was removed from a cruise ship and hospitalized in Hawaii, and in an interview in the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* drops some revealing insights: "I've always been afraid of beautiful girls, particularly beautiful and intelligent or beautiful and ambitious girls. Beautiful girls know what the score is, and I'm just an old-fashioned country boy. A good-looking gal with ambition is explosively dangerous. She'd do things her mother wouldn't want her to do." He went on to say that if he had to mingle with such lovelies



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W. T. Benda (1873-1948) Watercolor, ink and colored pencil, 7 x 6.5", remaining part of *Life* magazine cover, March 8, 1923
This is a depiction of the first mask Benda made, which he called The Blue Demon, in February 1914.



Original illustration for *Esquire* calendar (May), 1956. Watercolor and gouache, 13.25" x 17". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

he'd take Marj along for protection. He next described his creation: "A face reflecting young innocence through half-closed eyes; long legs like a dancer; a good pair of lungs that can't masquerade as a boy in a sweater, and a muscular tummy—all in all the kind of girl you'd want your son to marry." He concluded by averring that there wasn't a girl in the world who looked like the Petty Girl, "But the way I pose her and put her together makes her thoroughly intriguing."

Again, as though life was issued with a schedule, in 1971 Arnold Gingrich fathered *Esquire's* "Welcome Back to the Forties" issue, with a George Lois-designed foldout cover of the swinging Petty Girl from 1941. Inside, a double-page spread contained four other images from the '41 series. Because of this, in his San Francisco *Examiner* column, Herb Caen revealed George's whereabouts. George wrote Arnold, "It seems you started something. Increased mail and phone calls to one supposedly dead. All suggest Norman Rockwell-type consolidation of Petty Girls with legend."

Herein, Petty on being published, circa 1971, as told by Harold Hayes, editor of *Esquire*, to Harry Abrams, publisher:

"I spoke to George Petty again...if nothing of value for the magazine comes of our discussions, I think, at the very least, I am assured a marriage proposal—but to business. Petty is flattered by the fact that Harry Abrams has indicated an interest in publishing a book on his work. He feels the book should

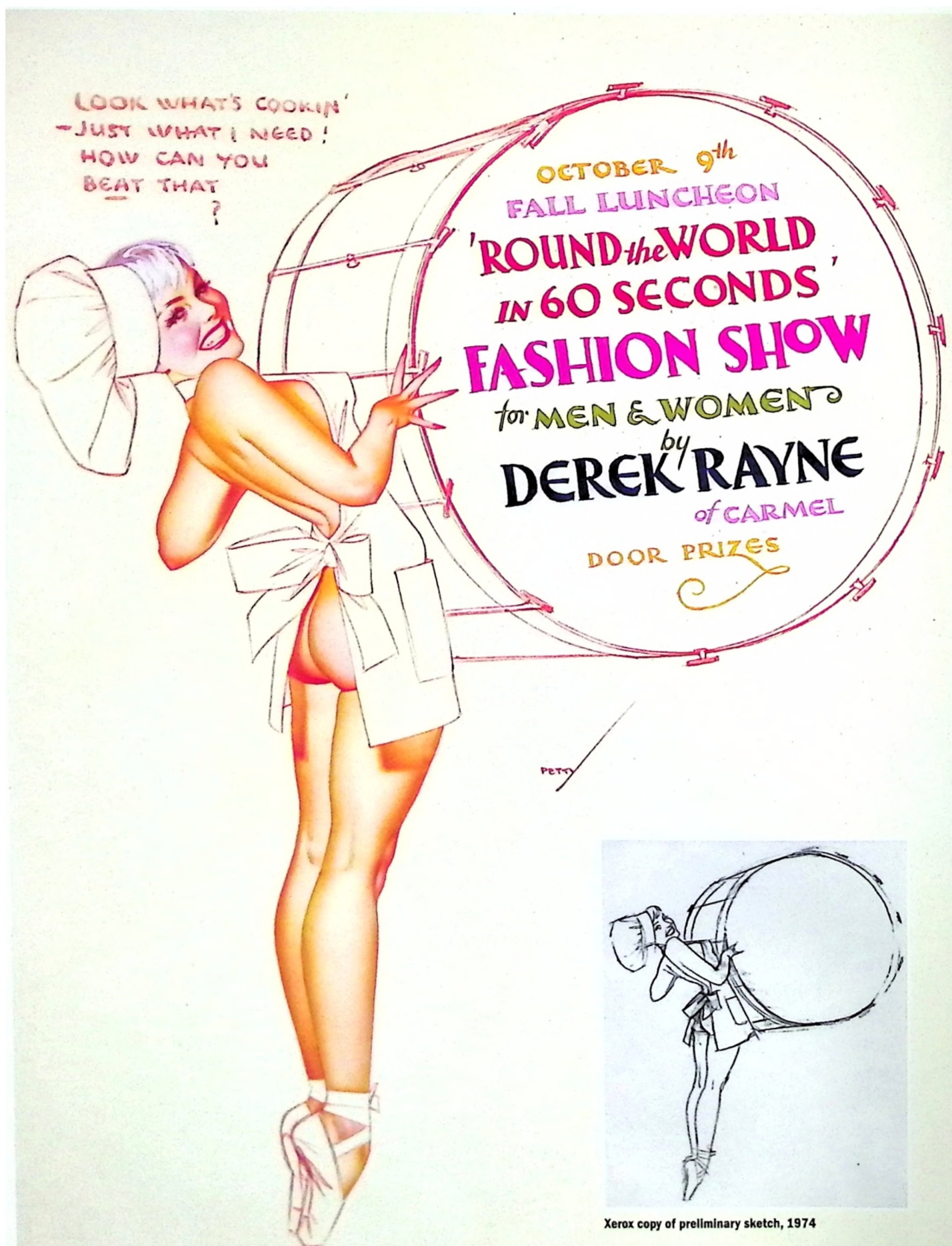
be a less ambitious undertaking than the Rockwell—in size, scope and price. (Petty views Rockwell as an important and venerable artist of international renown, and himself, quite modestly, as a, 'flash in the pan who got lucky, a bartender who gives the boys a fair shake.') He suggested something in soft cover that would sell for under \$10." Quite modest, indeed.

"As you know Petty met with some people in LA whom he describes as artists and promoters—he is disinclined to talk of their proposal in detail. What he is willing to say, the L.A. folks want his permission to package his work and sell it where they choose. That is, if they can't find the right publisher, they want to sell it to any publisher, perhaps print and peddle it themselves. Petty does not like the idea of a Brand X imprimatur. What he does like: they are willing—he says they are willing—to reproduce from reproductions. Here we come to the important stipulation: he wants to use old plates or reproductions in production of the book. I said I was not familiar with all types of reproduction, but around here we achieve best results by shooting from original art or transparencies. He is quite firm about not wishing to supply originals, because he doesn't want the bother of packing, logging, and shipping, etc.—I told him if necessary we would supply the help he needed or arrange to have the art shot out there. He did not change his stand.

"Regarding money: Can he be paid, 'in one lump sum, bingo.' He isn't interested in some protracted royalty basis.



Original illustration for Ice-Capades, 1965. Watercolor and gouache, 23" x 17.5". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration for Hacienda Carmel, Carmel, CA, 1974. Watercolor and gouache on board. INSET: Preliminary sketch

As he puts it, 'I don't know how much longer I've got; I'm seventy-seven. I'd like to be paid off and enjoy it while I can.' As to the book's content, he isn't interested in going into 'historical detail. The picture is the thing, not history.' He's a difficult, cagey old buzzard. Unless we go to him with something specific, say to him, this is what we'd like to do—we are going to have to continue this verbal fencing, with each conversation producing a new parry." Needless to say, Abrams tip-toed away from the whole idea. (It would be another 26 years before a book on George Petty was published, and then under the liberal and patient auspices of Marjorie Petty.)

The following year, in a burst of nostalgia, Gingrich convinced George to render his interpretation of the Petty Girl at Forty. "I resisted them for over a month," said George. "I told 'em that the Petty Girl was about 20 years old when I started her in 1933, which would make her 60 now. And nude? Ludicrous!" Nevertheless, he did it. "I felt sure they'd shoot it right back to me and didn't care if they did. Maybe I'm coming back. Maybe I'm 'camp,' if I understand the meaning of the word."

Far from it. The concept stands with his best work, harking back to his finest years—bearing a freshness of pose, paint application, and anatomy that had appeared to be lost to him. And in no little way is this due to the absence of the ballet shoe. Upon publication in the February '73 issue, George wrote Gingrich: "It's so nice to be remembered—and your editorial crew did a delightful job on an old friend...you have made an old man pretty happy."

Encouraged, George produced a handful of paintings for special events at the Hacienda, his former reticence regarding his work and his person seemed to dwindle in direct proportion to his distance from the public eye. Around this time Marjorie took him along, house hunting. George made it a point to introduce himself and make it very clear just who the current occupants had looking over their property. "I didn't know whether to gag him or bag him," Marjorie recalled with a little smile.

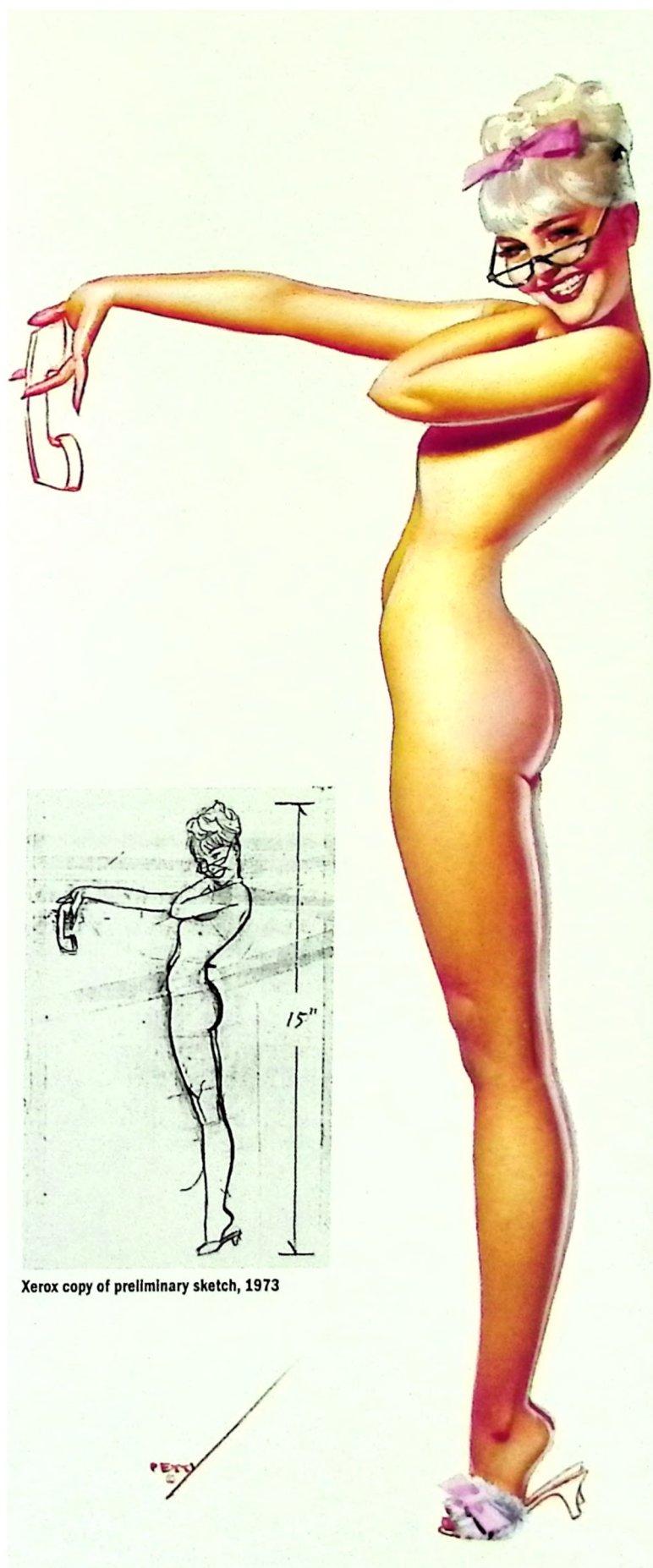
These last few works, done just a year before his death, show an artist of remarkably undiminished power. They reflect the elegance and humor of the '30s as well as the compositional dynamics and technical finesse of the '40s. They are uniquely the work of George Petty—a fitting final statement from a great and innovative American artist who, abashed by any such talk, preferred to be thought "a great American businessman."

George Petty was hospitalized with chronic edema in the spring of 1975. He died of natural causes on July 21. 🍷

— by Reid Stewart Austin, 2006

Reid Stewart Austin was an art director for *Playboy* magazine, and worked personally with Alberto Vargas for over 20 years. He was the author of *Alberto Vargas: The Authorized Biography* (1978) as well as *Varga: The Esquire Years* (1987), *The Classic Pin-up Art of George Petty* (1998), and several articles on Vargas for *Playboy* and other national magazines. Reid passed away in 2006.

Special thanks to Heritage Auctions, HA.com, and to Illustration House, NY, for the use of many of the photographs featured in this article.



Xerox copy of preliminary sketch, 1973

"The Petty Girl at Forty," George Petty's last editorial illustration. *Esquire*, February 1973
Watercolor and gouache on board



Original magazine illustration, circa 1900. Ink on paper, 21" x 14" Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Charles Dana Gibson at work

Charles Dana Gibson

Master Illustrator

by R. Gary Land

Today the term 'Gibson Girl' is a scantily-defined nod to an earlier era, a label referring to women who wore their hair up at around the turn of the last century. That definition sells the term short. In her day, the Gibson Girl was a fashion icon who helped legitimize American culture, freeing it from being the ugly step-child of European haute couture.

Although hard to imagine today, at one time American culture was considered the province of bumpkins, and barely-housebroken savages. We didn't innovate, we imitated—and poorly at that. No member of high society would be caught in fashion that wasn't produced in Europe. Anglophilia was rampant. American fashion took its lead without question from the cities of Europe. Gibson's maternal great grandfather William Lovett, a painter, went so far as to Gallicize his name to 'Guillaume Lovett,' and ran ads soliciting for work in French in a Boston paper. It was into this world Charles Dana Gibson was born, and his pen would have a major role in tearing down its barriers.

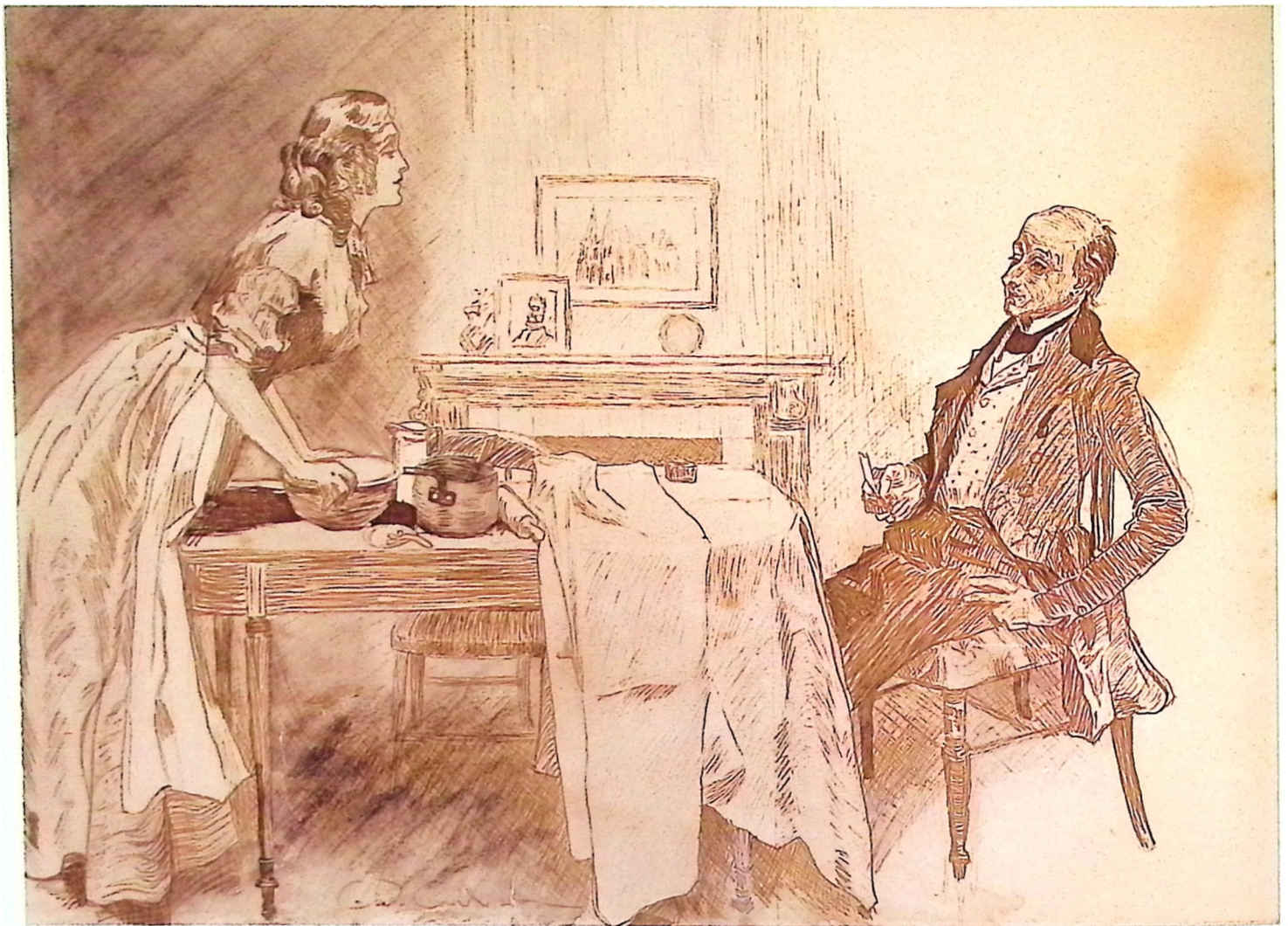
THE EARLY DAYS

Charles Dana Gibson was born on September 14, 1867 to Charles DeWolf Gibson, a Civil War lieutenant, and Josephine Elizabeth Lovett. Both parents came from an almost unbroken chain of New England ancestors that stretched all the way back to the early settlers. In a biography of Gibson's life published in 1936, author Fairfax Downey refers to an incident several years earlier when 17 year old Charles Sr., full of patriotic

fervor and armed with letters of reference, took himself to the White House intending to plead for an appointment to West Point. For three days he waited in an anteroom, until he was at last ushered in to Lincoln's presence. He pled his case and handed the letters of reference to the President. Lincoln gently handed them back, stating that while he was sure they verified his good character, the West Point positions were going to the sons of officers killed in battle, and wasn't that the right thing to do? Gibson left without his desired result, but with a precious memory.¹

Circumstances would not deny him for long. Heavy losses lowered the age requirements, and he soon found a lieutenantancy in the 14th Rhode Island Heavy Artillery. After several campaigns, in 1864 he came home on furlough to the family home, 'The Mount'. A lady named Josephine, his cousin several times removed, was down for a visit, and the gallant soldier and the beautiful young woman were swept away in a war time romance. They married several months later at Niagara Falls. Their first child, Langdon, was born in Boston in 1866. A brother, Charles Dana, followed 20 months later. Another son was born, but he died in infancy. This tragedy was followed by the births of three sisters, Elizabeth, Annie, and Josephine.

At age five Dana fell ill, and his father took to entertaining the youngster by cutting silhouettes out of paper for the child to play with. Soon playing with them wasn't enough, and Dana began to cut his own figures. When he was over his illness,



Original Illustration for *Martin Chuzzlewit* by Charles Dickens, 1887. Sepia Ink on paper, 9" x 11.5" Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

Dana took to wearing a pair of blunt scissors on a ribbon around his neck, so as to be handy should he want to create more silhouettes. This went on for several years, and Dana became so proficient at sculpting images with paper and scissors that what at first was merely a curiosity that his proud parents would display to visitors, led to his presenting a number of these works in a local art show at age 11. A critic at the time said, "Perhaps the most remarkable thing in the whole exhibition are the frames that contain the silhouettes on white paper cut by Master Dana Gibson, a boy now of eleven or twelve years old, but who cut many of these figures—and many of the best of them—when he was but eight years old. In almost every case they are cut from the idea in his own mind, not copied from other pictures, and they are done without any aid whatever from teaching; the work is the product of instinct without training. The subjects are all of life in action. Whatever is done is done with a perfection that we never saw surpassed."³

But paper and scissors weren't the only thing keeping Gibson occupied. Langdon and Dana fell in with an older boy, Daniel Carter Beard, a wildlife and woodcraft aficionado.



A cut paper silhouette by Gibson

Beard would later go on to found the "Sons of Daniel Boone," a scouting group for boys that would later merge with the Boy Scouts of America. The three boys would go on long winter hikes in driving snow, and in the summer jog through the woodlands following a compass bearing. The stamina and a love of exploration outdoors would stick with both boys. Langdon was later the ornithologist on one of Peary's Arctic expeditions, thanks to the love of birds he picked up during these explorations.

In an attempt to put Dana into a trade that would allow him to exploit his artistic talents, the family enlisted the aid of a cousin, Mrs. Robert Cutting, who knew the 'right people' to get him an apprenticeship. Mrs. Cutting took Dana in tow to the offices of George B. Post, a noted architect of the era. As he was responsible for the decorative arts then in fashion being implemented on a number of mansions, it was thought one of the worthies doing the implementation would be a good master for the boy. Augustus Saint-Gaudens was selected, and Post summoned his carriage and took his charge to the master's workplace. Initially impressed by the boy's skill, he assigned him to work



Original magazine illustration. Charcoal on paper, 21.5" x 13.5." Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration for *Puck* magazine, December 7, 1887. Ink on paper, 16" x 20". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

on sculptures, but they held no interest with Dana and his time with Saint-Gaudens was short.

In the summer of 1881, Dana got a job as a messenger boy on Wall Street. He did his job well enough, but on July 2, President Garfield was shot, resulting in patriotic fervor. A contest was held among the messenger boys to draw the best portrait of the fallen President, with the prize being funded by the entrants themselves. Dana won handily and netted the dollar in prize money. Small though the prize was, it was a turning point for him. He had concrete assurance that he could turn his skills to making a living.

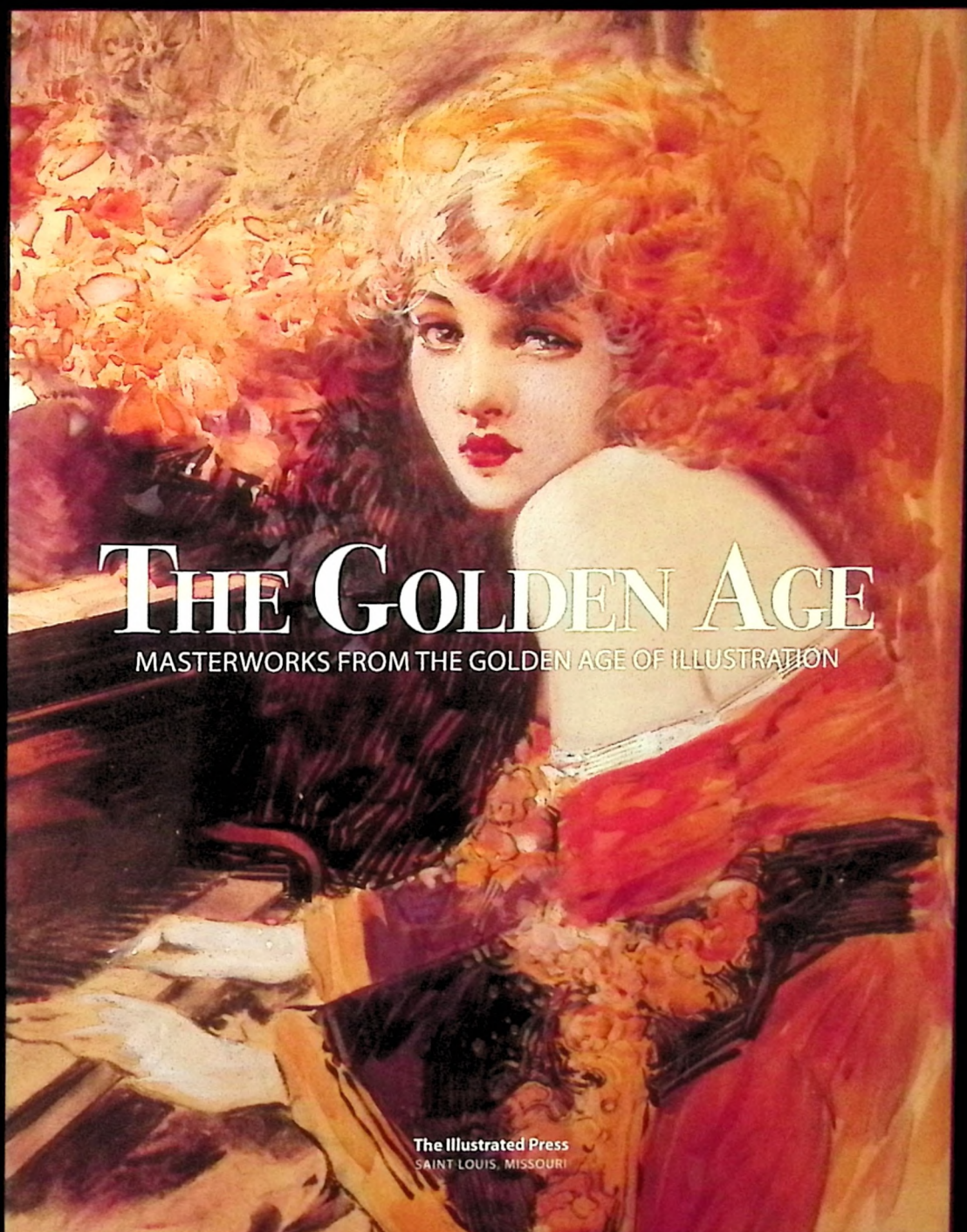
Three years later, in 1884, with High School behind him and college beyond his family's financial means, he took the entrance exam for the Art Student's League of New York, whose \$5 a month tuition was more in line with their budget. The League featured a 400-strong student body, and a corps of instructors that included luminaries such as Thomas Eakins, William Merritt Chase, Kenyon Cox, J. Aldin Weir, and others. It was run cooperatively by the students, and boasted a number of graduates that went on to fame and fortune, including Howard Pyle. This was a place for serious trade work and "only serious workers were allowed to

join classes." For a short span of time, one of his classmates was Frederick Remington, who'd bested Gibson in arm wrestling for the position of class strong man. But Remington was soon for the wide open spaces of the West. Gibson would continue on at the League for two years before striking out on his own.

But fame was not quick in coming to Gibson. He drew and drew. He submitted and submitted. He got a few occasional pieces of work on minor projects, but more often than not he was merely shown the door. In the winter of 1886, it was a beaten down and fatalistic Charles Dana Gibson that brought a slim folio of drawings to the offices of *Life*. The magazine was launched in 1883 by John Mitchell, Edward Martin, (a founder of the *Harvard Lampoon*), and Andrew Miller. The magazine as it existed then was a bastion of satire and social conscience, eagerly picking fights when it found a just cause, and just as likely to wax sentimental. It was a magazine whose popularity was reflected in a readership belonging to all strata of New York Society. It was into this office, with low expectations, that Gibson entered. Mitchell, the editor, reviewed the various items and settled on one in particular. A cartoon of a dog baying at the moon with a brief



Gibson's first cartoon for *Life*



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Original illustration for *Life*, April 30, 1903. Ink on board, 18.5" x 28.5". Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY

quote from the *Mikado*, "Ah pray make no mistake, we are not shy; We're very wide awake, the moon and I." For this illustration Dana earned \$4. As he left the offices, he walked on air.

In the 1000th issue, Mitchell would later recount, "Having myself, as a professional, done some climbing up the slippery hill of Art, I detected beneath the outer badness of these drawings peculiarities rarely discovered in the efforts of a beginner. For the beginner, as a rule, shows far more admiration for technical cleverness than for the more serious qualities of drawing and composition; and he endeavors to conceal his shortcomings by elaborate and misdirected labors. But this beginner had started out on fresher lines. His faults were good, able-bodied faults that held their heads up and looked you in the eye. No dodging of the difficult points, no tricks, no uncertainty, no slurring of outlines. To be sure his ladies, in consequence, were often clad in boiler iron and although he and the Almighty, at that time, were holding different views as to the effects of light and shade, there was always courage and honesty in whatever he undertook."⁴

He didn't find himself as fortunate with the next several submissions. Mitchell rejected them one after another, but with a sincere regret that convinced Gibson to plow on, and little by little more pieces saw publication. *Life* wasn't alone in valuing Gibson. *Puck* published several pieces and tried to get him under contract. His first month's income was \$33, rising eventually to a November total of \$184.50. Other similar magazines hit his services. *Tid-Bits*, perhaps a few rungs

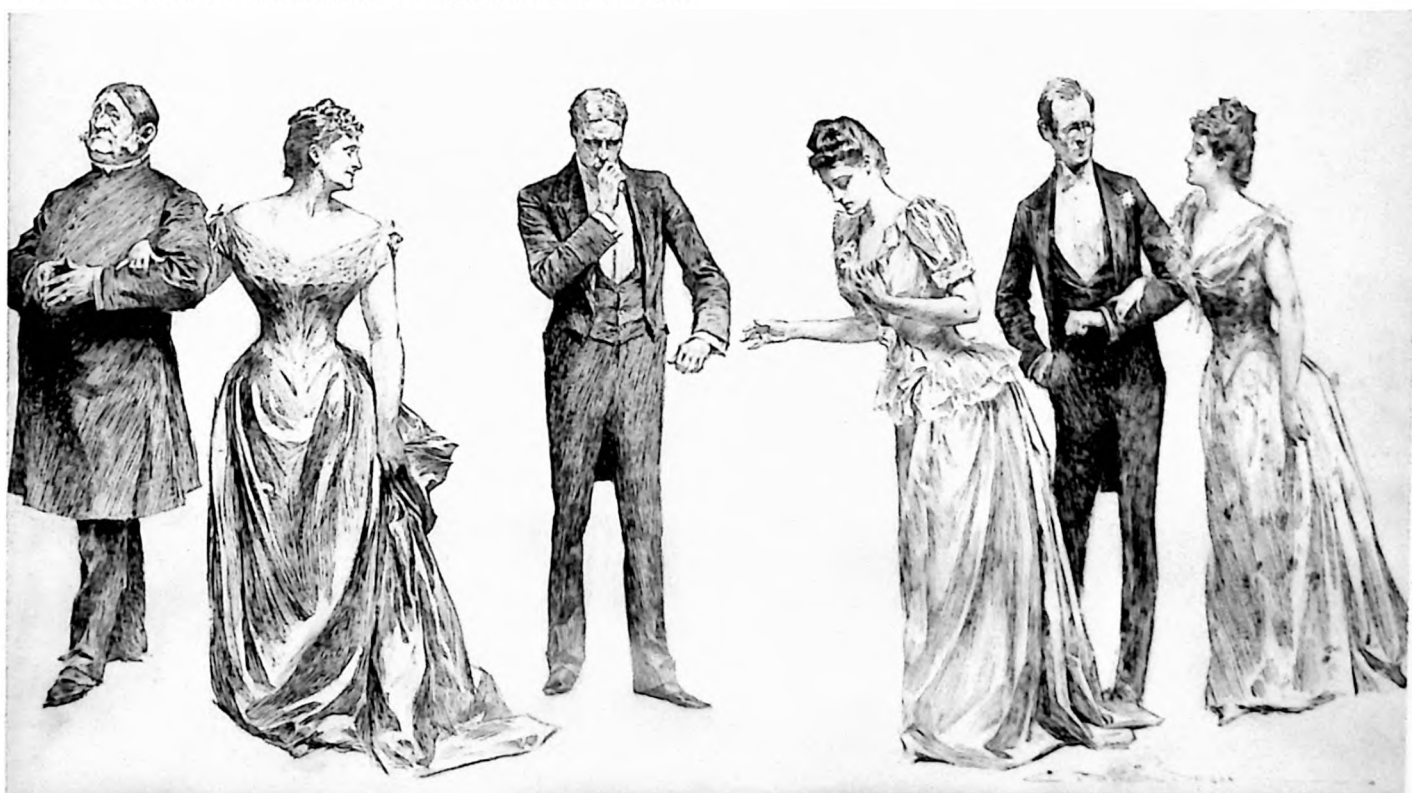
down the ladder from *Life*, became another regular buyer of his drawings. Eager for work, Gibson became the Editor, Charles Balestier's go-to man. He would take on all the work other more established artists might pass on. He'd be the one to have a piece commissioned at noon ready to go to press before three. Balestier convinced him to move into a studio at 33rd and Broadway, so as to have him close at hand. Gibson would follow Balestier to the theatre with pencil and paper to sketch some dramatic scene that would shortly appear as a double spread in *Tid-Bits*. Although he would get more wide acclaim with his later work, his talents were forged and refined in this unrelenting atmosphere. He stayed at the magazine until 1888, when publications with deeper pockets began soliciting him for work. By this time, he was regularly drawing \$250 a month from *Life* alone, with his total in October of that year at \$600.

A EUROPEAN ADVENTURE

By 1888, at the age of 21, Gibson had a regular enough income, and enough saved to make his own way to Europe to study. His first stop after arriving in London was the house of George Du Maurier. He introduced himself this way: "I'm Charles Dana Gibson. I'm an American. I draw, and you have been my master for years."⁵ Du Maurier was at the time famous for his drawings of pretty women, and in the coming years the two artists would often be compared and contrasted in *Life* and other magazines. The two became fast friends



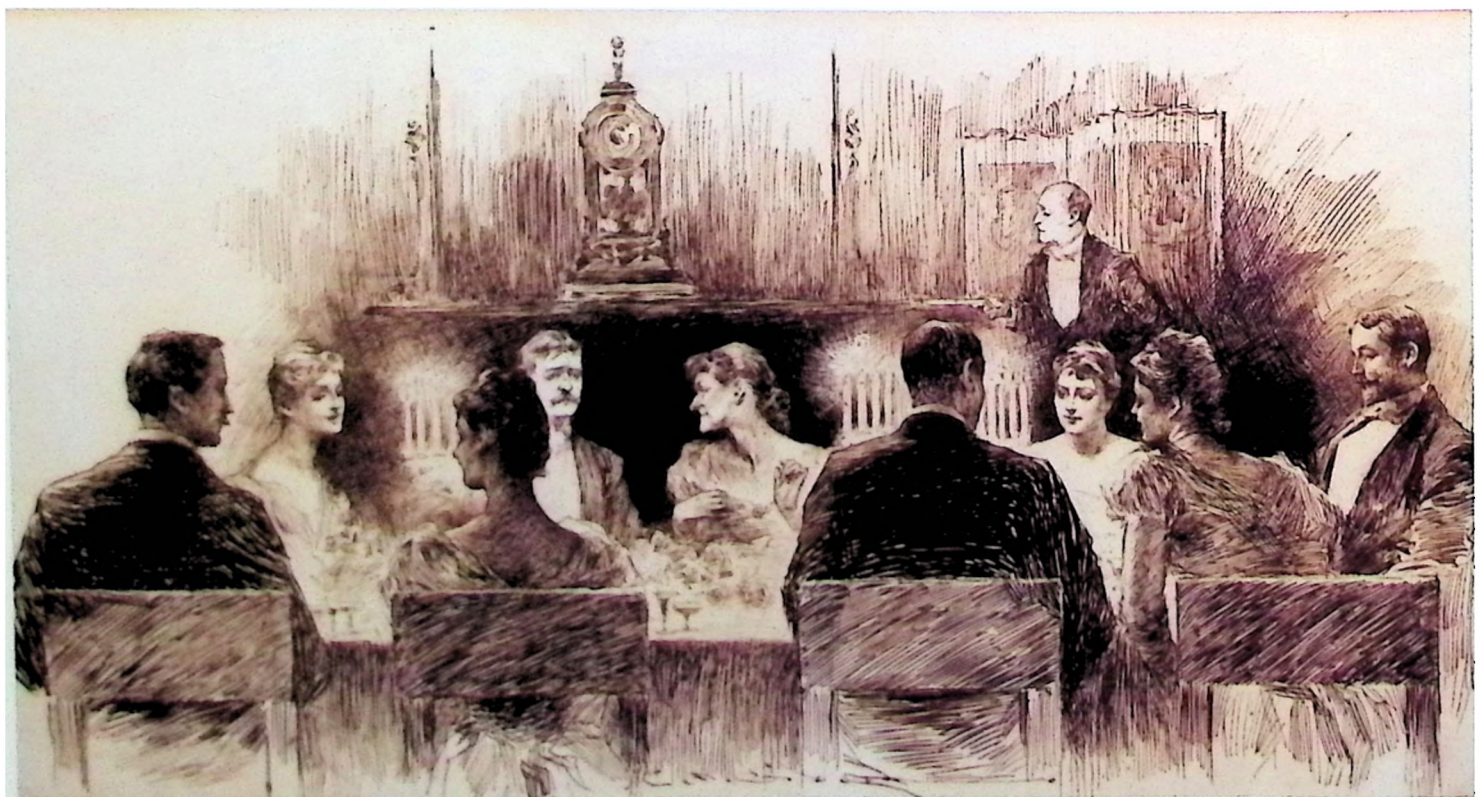
Original Illustration. Ink on board. Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY



Original Illustration. Ink on board. Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY



Original Illustration. Ink on paper, 19.5" x 26.75". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration. Ink on paper, 14" x 25". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original Illustration. Ink on paper, 19.5" x 26.75". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

and friendly rivals. The Eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* remarked, "His admitted devotion to Du Maurier, in reverence for beautiful women beautifully attired, has led some critics to set him down as a mere disciple, while his powerful individuality has led others to accuse of monotony; but a serious examination of his work has seemed to reveal that he has gone beyond the genius of Du Maurier in sophistication, if not in variety, of subjects and treatment. As much as any other artist, Mr. Gibson has studiously tried new experiments in the new fields opened by modernized processes of photo-engraving, and has been an important influence in both English and American line illustration."⁶

Gibson spent the next two months in Paris at the *Atelier Julien*, a noted art school. He spent his days in stuffy close-windowed classrooms, eagerly drawing nude after nude, both the beautiful and the grotesque. He and his fellow students received critiques and advice twice weekly from the professors. By evening, he and his fellows would take in the Paris night life. This was the summer the Eiffel Tower opened, and the city was in celebration.

SUCCESS BACK HOME

Although brief, his stay in Paris was a watershed on his technique. Gone was the indecision, and in its place was a new vigor. The diamond was no longer in the rough. His work in *Life* was opening other doors. *Harper's*, *The Century*, and *Scribner's*, the powerhouses of publishing in New York, all offered work to the newly returned artist. The Salmagundi Club, whose membership was a 'who's who' of New York's

most talented, held a show of Gibson's black and white work. Among those in attendance were John Singer Sargent and Edwin Austin Abbey, who both highly praised Gibson's work. Abbey went so far as to invite Dana to stop by his studio the next day. When Gibson arrived, he found that master of detail engrossed in drawing an old silver tea set which would serve as a minor fixture in a picture he was working on. The two got along famously, and Abbey invited him to his bachelor dinner and to serve as an usher at his wedding. The dinner, held in Abbey's studio at the Judge building at Fifth Avenue and 17th Street, had an A-list of attendees. Sargent of course, who would also usher at the wedding; John Twachtman; Charles F. McKim, a celebrated architect; Gibson's former master August Saint-Gaudens; Stanford White, soon to design Madison Square Garden; and A.B. Frost. As a memento, the gathered artists each decorated one another's 'shirt fronts', and Gibson would leave with a single canvas featuring the work of all those attending.

The next morning tragedy struck. Gibson's mother summoned him to the family home in Flushing. His father had developed a rapid and mortal case of pneumonia. Langdon was unreachable, exploring the Grand Canyon with the Stanton expedition. Charles De Wolf Gibson had been an avid follower of his son's work in *Life*, and his last hours were cheered hearing about his son's new celebrated friends.

When Gibson moved his quarters to a studio in the Alpine building in 1893, it was decided that his sister Josephine would stay with him on the weekends. Josephine, who was about 10 at the time, gives us a window into his life:



Original illustration, circa 1900. Ink on paper, 21" x 15". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

"I was a protection to him; places he couldn't take 'his little sister' he didn't want to go. People, even his friends who might have used Dana's studio as a meeting place, went elsewhere. His work was too important for him to waste time doing things he didn't enjoy. He spent hours at his drawing board, and I have seen a model fall to the floor after posing for a long time in one position. I know from my own experience how difficult it is to hold one position for any length of time without training. Nearly all Dana's early pictures were posed for by Miss Minnie Clarke, a professional model who not only was untiring in her effort to help, but was able to portray any type needed: old, young, fat or thin. She entered into the spirit of the picture and was largely responsible for the success of Dana's early drawings. She might better be called 'The Original Gibson Girl' as she appeared so often... Some models were easier to draw than others, and when a difficult model left I could always tell as the floor would be covered with sheets of cardboard, each with a new start of the figure he was trying to portray. Dana disliked to have people come to the studio when he was at work. It disturbed his thoughts and I have seen him quite upset by an interruption. He never showed his drawings to anyone and there were very few of his pictures about the studio. He was seldom satisfied with his own work, but not because he didn't try. There was a lot of himself

in everything he did, and at the end of the day he was tired; the theatre relaxed him and made him forget his work... There was the studio engagement book to be kept. I marked the good models with two stars and the others with one and some I crossed off, but always kept their addresses, just in case they were needed. Those that were difficult and untrained took much longer to draw. There was quite a responsibility in dismissing a model, as was proved one day when Dana received a letter which read: 'When you receive this I will be dead.'

A little man had come to the studio one day asking for work. He said he had never been a model, but it was very urgent that he make some money. Dana gave him ten dollars and told him to come back but that he had no place for him at present. I was not at the studio when he returned, but Dana drew him twice. The second time he came he left a 'vest,' which was fortified with whale bones like a ladies corset. When he called for it, Dana told him that he wouldn't need it again. He was a sad little man and spoke very little English, but seemed to understand, and was grateful for what Dana had done and tried to kiss his hand at parting. The letter arrived a few days later. It was to have been a busy day at the studio, but Dana couldn't work. What if it was a hoax to excite sympathy? He canceled all engagements, notified the police and instructed me to open the door to no one, and left for the man's address which

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Cover Illustration for *A Widow and Her Friends*, 1901. Ink on paper, 17.5" x 11.5". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original Illustration of a "Gibson Girl." Ink on board, 20" x 18"
Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

we had recorded in the book... Dana had reached the little man's hotel just after the police had broken into the gas filled room. It was not too late, but the letter had been real. Another few minutes and he would have been dead. Dana paid his hotel bill; sent him to a hospital, and arranged for a return trip to Russia if he recovered.⁷

"Dana's method of education was unique perhaps but very effective. There was never a 'don't' but many words of praise. If I was thorough in the bathroom before breakfast, this was 'good.' If I washed my hands or brushed my hair without being told, he was 'proud of me.' If I didn't disturb him while he was at work, I was rewarded by being told that 'no one else could possibly be such a comfort.' Nothing on earth would have made me undeserving of this praise."⁸

THE GIBSON GIRL

F. Hopkins Smith, in his five part tabloid series *American Illustrators* in 1893, writes:

"He is at his best when he draws the American girl, and that girl is a lady." Rejoined the critic, "One of our few good writers on art is right when she says: 'As a chronicler of well-bred American life, Mr. Gibson stands easily first.' Listen to this from her pen, commenting on a recent exhibition of his. I have it here in my pocket: 'No one is so sure as Mr. Gibson to make

his young women look like ladies and his young men like manly gentlemen; and he has caught and fixed the true air and spirit of the 'American Girl.' Of course, he has not caught her in all of her protean variations. The action of different climates, the inter-mixture of different races, have made as many types of American girls as of chrysanthemums. His girl, too, is a lady; and while most American draftsmen can get the real type after a fashion, they can't draw ladies as Mr. Gibson does.' It is a difficult thing to compose a large group well, and most of Mr. Gibson's are extremely well composed. They are full of a variety that does not seem forced, but appears to result naturally from the exigencies of the subject. Their chief figures immediately assert themselves as such, although they are brought into true pictorial union with the accessory ones, and their story is always clearly suggested. They are strong and telling as arrangements of line. And in the distribution of their main masses of light and shade, they are admirably conceived for execution in pen and ink. If Mr. Gibson's pictures are always effective, it is largely because he draws both with force and grace, but largely, too, because he is never afraid of strong, big contrasts of color. Too many draftsmen work as though a generally grayish tone were their aim, or, in striving for sufficient contrasts, cut their work up into meaningless dabs of white and black. They don't make pictures—and Mr. Gibson does."



Original cover illustration for *The Edge of the Orient*, 1896. Ink on paper, 20.5" x 23". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration. Ink on paper, 19" x 18.5". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original illustration. Ink on paper. Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY



About Paris, 1905. Ink on paper, 19.5" x 28.75". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

A RETURN TO PARIS

In early 1894, Gibson returned to France and set about capturing Paris on paper. Although not able to speak even passable French, Dana spent most of his time out on the town with the American Ambassador, James B. Eustis, the two visiting the theatre scene and attempting to teach the French the fine art of poker. Richard Harding Davis was also taking the grand tour that year, and enlisted Gibson for what would become *About Paris*, serialized in *Harper's Magazine*. Taverns, cafés, and theatres were immortalized by Gibson's pen while in Davis's company. He also spent time in his studio. Eugenie, a popular French model immortalized in MacMonnies' *Bacchante* bronze in the New York Metropolitan Museum's collection, became Americanized as a Gibson Girl along with Suzanne, another model, who posed for *No Respector of a Widow's Grief*. The models initially had to be made to understand Gibson wanted to draw them with their clothes on.

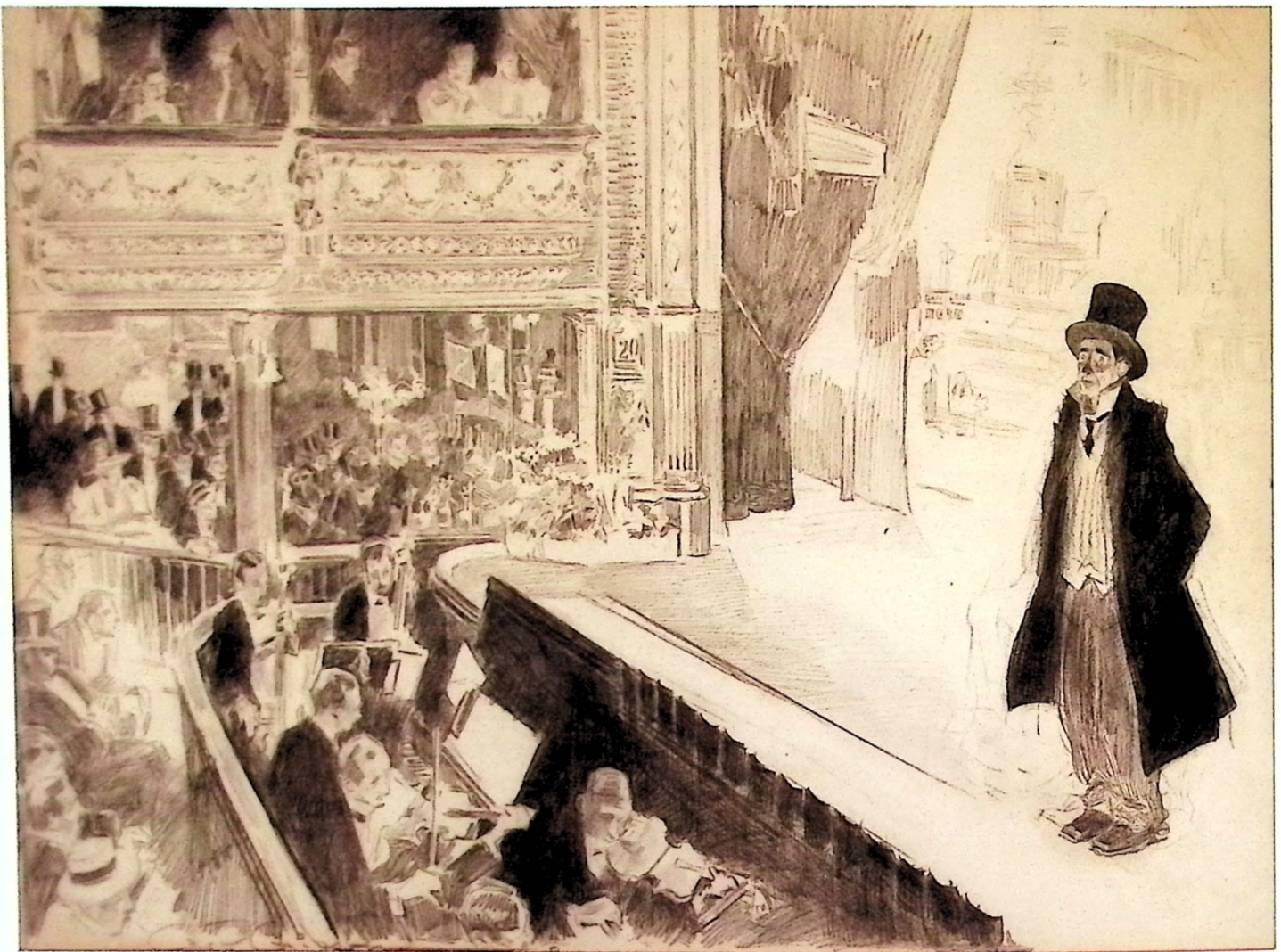
Charles Belmont Davis would later write, "Gibson's experience in Paris was a most important one for it unquestionably had more effect on his work than any of his later travels. Almost the first of his sketches to reach this country show the effect of the French school of black-and-white artists. He gradually drew away from his fine line drawing, and told his story in a few bold strokes, where he would formerly have used a hundred. The change may have been due altogether to an appreciation and to a more intimate knowledge of the French artists and their work, or it is possible that the enthu-

siasm with which he was received as a master of his art in Paris may have inspired him to strike out in bolder methods."⁹

MARRIAGE

Although love and romance had been his province for years on the printed page, it was not until 1894 that it would strike him personally. Irene Langhorne of Richmond Virginia had been introduced to society in 1893, and later that season was invited by Ward McAllister, the de facto ruler of New York 'Society,' to march with him to the Patriarch's Ball, a keystone of the social calendar. The event was all it promised, and Irene was so taken by New York that she attended the Horse Show a year later. Dining at Delmonico's one evening, she spotted acquaintance Robert Russell dining with Dana and Richard Harding Davis, freshly returned from Paris. On the way out, she passed the table and Russell rose and followed her to the door. Upon his return, he informed his companions that they were invited to tea at his residence the following day and meet this beauty. Gibson was smitten and proceeded to court her, making his way down to Richmond to call on her several times in the coming months. Her father, the colonel, at first referred to him as "that damn Yankee," but soon warmed to the charming Gibson.

The couple were married on November 7, 1895, in Richmond. They then embarked on a tour of the Continent, visiting Gibraltar, Spain, Naples, Rome, Florence, Monte Carlo, Paris, and London. Even on his honeymoon, Gibson's



Original Illustration, 1897. Pencil on paper, 19.5" x 28.75". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

pen wasn't still. His sketches would later be compiled into *London As Seen By Charles Dana Gibson*. During their London visit they were the toast of the town. The U.S. Ambassador invited the Gibsons to be presented at the first drawing room soirée of the year at Buckingham Palace, and Gibson was commissioned by the *London Graphic* to provide illustrations of the event. The critics raved, "In all the crowd of American men of talent who have delighted and fascinated the British people, none has more firmly established himself in favor than Mr. Charles Dana Gibson... His English pictures nearly persuade us that we are almost as clever and charming and beautiful as Americans. We realize that his British 'nobs' are only puppets in a marionette show. He understands and esteems us."¹⁰

Upon their return to New York, the Gibsons moved into a Studio atop the new *Life* building at 17 West 31st Street. Irene was delighted by the location, right in the heart of the shops and theatre district. 1897 brought a new member into the family, Irene Langhorne Gibson. She would be immortalized many times in her father's drawings. Her brother Langhorne would come two years later.

Doubleday, McClure commissioned Gibson to do a series of drawings in Egypt, and the new family came in tow.



London as Seen by Charles Dana Gibson, 1897

Although justifiably proud of his sketches, Gibson agonized and struggled when the publisher insisted he write text to go along with them. It was an ordeal, and one he would never repeat. They returned from Egypt by way of Munich. While there, he was commissioned to illustrate *Rupert of Hentzau*, the sequel to the *Prisoner of Zenda*. It was a great opportunity, as the background of Munich was a perfect stage for the story. In his quest for models, he discovered Mr. Pipp. Gibson was intrigued by the idea of doing a series of illustrations for *Life* about Americans traveling abroad, but was stuck for a 'hook' to hang it on.

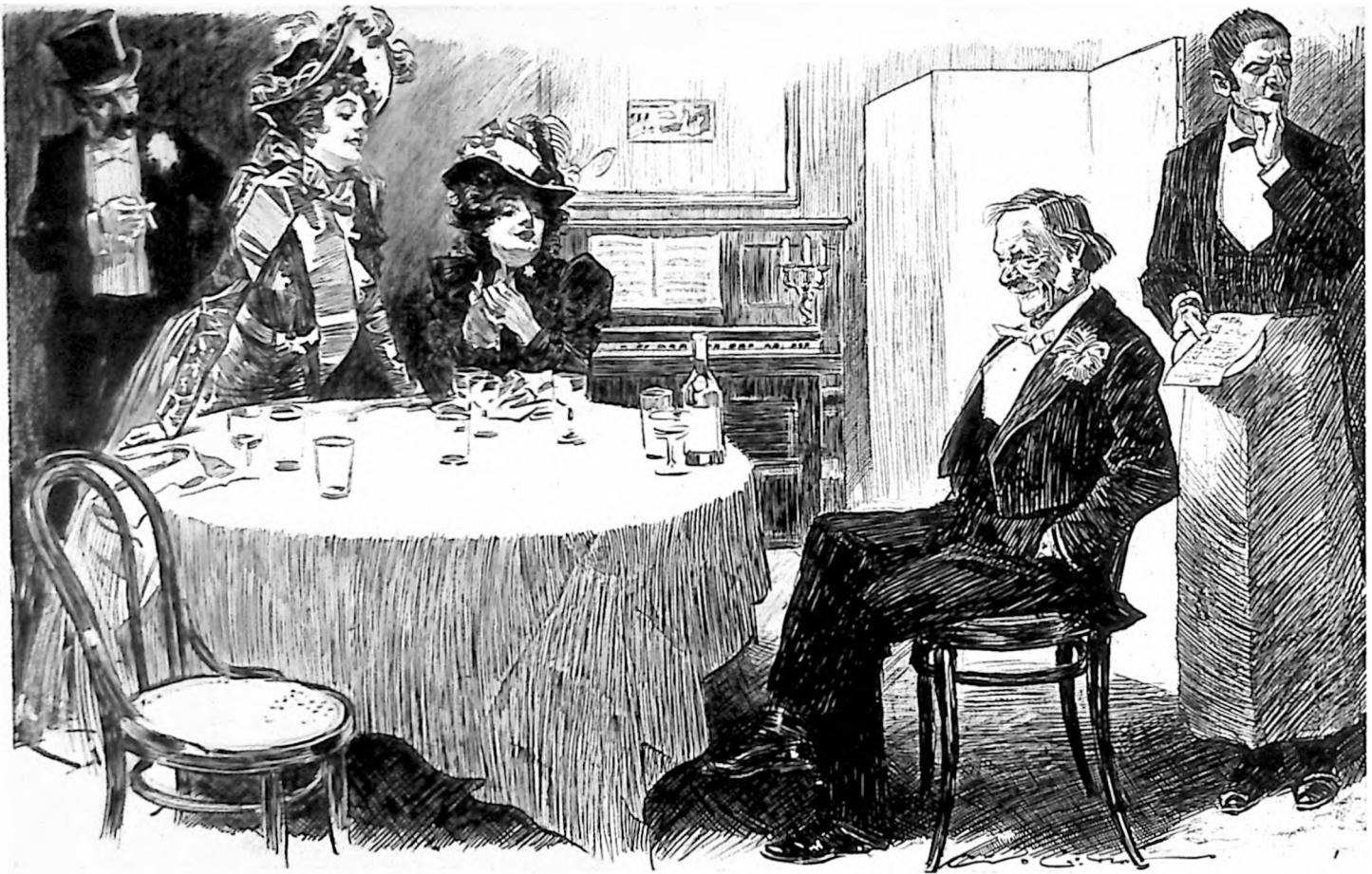
"At this juncture, an old German wandered into the studio of the American artist, who he had heard was hiring models, and apologetically asked to be employed. As an old man 'type' he could have been in no more than occasional demand in the Munich art colony. A small, mild, downtrodden fellow, it seemed to be written all over him that a stern Better Half had ordered him out to find work and not to come home with any of his excuses. Framed in the doorway, he appeared to be the composite portrait of a thousand hen pecked husbands."¹¹



Original illustration for *Life*, circa 1897. Ink on paper. Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY



Original illustration for *Life*, circa 1897. Ink on paper. Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY



Original Illustration for *Life*, November 3, 1898. Ink on paper, 19" x 29.5". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

In September of 1898, *Life* published the first in what would be collected into *The Education of Mr. Pipp*. Pipp, a man of means, is accompanied by a stout, domineering wife, and two beautiful daughters. The series was a hit, and what was initially only six drawings expanded to meet public demand.

SUCCESS

Gibson was on top of the world. In 1899, he was elected to the American Institute of Arts and Letters, (he would later serve as a director in 1932), and joined the Society of Illustrators in 1902, a year after its founding. Initially passed over for consideration because it was thought he was too busy and too famous for such things, he was elected President and served from 1904-1907, and 1909-1921. And the financial rewards were substantial too. *Collier's*, rapidly becoming home to Frost, Pyle, Remington, and Parrish, set its sights on Gibson and offered the princely sum of \$800-900 a drawing if they could get him exclusively. But Gibson was unwilling to cut his ties with *Life* out of loyalty to Mitchell, who had started and fostered his career. *Collier's* changed tactics and offered to share exclusivity with *Life*. This brought consternation from Edward Bok of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. A bidding war ensued, with *Collier's* coming out on top after agreeing to buy 100 double page illustrations for \$100,000 over four years, and Gibson agreeing to work only for *Collier's* and *Life*. Initially the investment was doubtful, as long time *Collier's* subscribers found Gibson's society drawings too delicate a

fare and cancellation notices started coming in. But new subscribers, eager to get more Gibson, more than compensated in both number and income class, delighting advertisers and more than paying for the costs involved. *Collier's* went so far as to produce a special issue on October 15, 1904, sporting a Gibson cover, frontispiece, a letter by Gibson to young artists, multiple illustrations, and a tribute to Gibson by Robert Bridges.

Money flowed in easily, and the Gibsons abandoned apartment dwelling for a home they built on East 73rd. Soon after, in 1903, while sailing into Islesboro, Maine, he spotted a 700 acre island. He purchased the island and built a summer home on it that he would later retire to.

At the height of his fame, Gibson took a radical step. Taking as example many of his fellow illustrators, he wanted to make the jump to painting. In November of 1905, Gibson and his family left for Spain, and then on to Paris. But success in this new field proved elusive. Fellow artists felt his paintings lacked distinction, and Gibson himself threw out many of his paintings. In 1907, the choice was taken out of his hands. The Panic of 1907, which would end only when J.P. Morgan stepped in to shore up the finances of the United States, ravaged the economy, including the Knickerbocker Trust Company which held a large part of Gibson's savings. He wasn't ruined, but the life of an itinerant painter was beyond his means. The Gibsons returned to America.

Waiting for him at home was a message that William C.



Girl In Red and Blue, 1942. Oil on canvas, 37" x 28". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Old Friends Since 1778. Oil on canvas, 24" x 20". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Girl in a White Dress. Oil on canvas. Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY

Gibson had come down from New York to see him. 'Pop' Gibson, former art editor at *Puck*, was now in that position at *Cosmopolitan*, and came bearing a commission to serialize Robert Chambers' *The Common Law*. The series was a popular hit, and once again Gibson was a sought after property. The Gibson Girl began making her rounds again, playing golf, dancing to popular music, and even taking on careers. She was aware of the English Suffragettes and often gave a nod to their cause. But her most important calling came in August of 1914.

THE DIVISION OF PICTORIAL PUBLICITY

While Gibson had often championed social causes and dabbled in politics, the sinking of the *Lusitania* lit a patriotic fire in him that would inflame his pen for the duration of the war. Using the membership of the Society of Illustrators as a nucleus, the Vigilantes were formed. Gibson was nominated their leader, and modestly agreed to take the post, knowing full well the temperaments involved in such a group of artists would be difficult to manage. He appointed Frank De S. Casey as his second in command. They offered their services to the Government without compensation. The group ran into problems almost at once. The Administration had been preoccupied running a patriotic cartoon contest, and didn't respond with much interest at first in the group's ability to contribute. When they finally did, they were more offensive than receptive. Treasury Secretary William McAdoo attended a dinner held for the purpose of working out details, and proceeded to read out a long and condescending contract that all artists would have to sign for their involvement. Attendees

responded by pitching pennies at the back of the room, and one wit was quoted shouting, "McAdoo about nothing!" But Gibson persevered, traveling to Washington to soothe the ruffled feathers with McAdoo, and continued to hold meetings of the Society in Chicago, Philadelphia, and other cities, traveling on his own dime until a fund was formed to pay for the modest expenses of the Division's operating budget. After jumping through hoops and dealing with red tape, the newly formed Division of Pictorial Publicity got approval for the production of several posters, and they were a hit. Soon Casey was shuttling regularly between New York and Washington with huge bundles of art, returning with new requests to be filled for various branches of government. Gibson handed these assignments out to those best suited to the subject. Wallace Morgan, Harvey Dunn, Ernest Peixotto, George Harding, Harry Townsend, J. Andre Smith, W.S. Aylward, and Walter Jack Duncan were given commissions to captain and sent to France to sketch at the Front.

The Division also participated in publicity stunts, erecting a huge 90 x 25 foot canvas at the New York Public Library, and filling it in front of crowds while promoting Liberty Loans. The various branches of the military and the allies were blocked out on the canvas, and specific artists were assigned to each one. N.C. Wyeth was given the Army, Henry Reuterdaahl the Navy, and on it went, down to the smallest nation of Allies. Gibson for his part was given the United States.

Over the next several years, Gibson gave unfailingly to the Division. Serving regularly as Toastmaster for their Thursday night meetings at the Salmagundi Club, where Foreign

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Original illustration. Ink on paper. Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY

officers, civilians involved in the War effort, and returned American officers would speak, his days and evenings were spent at the Division's business, while still managing to fit in many drawings for *Life*, often of the patriotic vein.

When victory came at last, Gibson's efforts were recognized by his fellows, who presented him with a bust of himself by James L. Fraser. France, for its part, made him a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, and Belgium an Officer of the Crown. Gibson continued to make the war and its after effects his subject matter, because he believed what he was doing meant something. In an essay published in *The Mentor*, Gibson opines on the cartoon:

"With it, Hogarth scourged and corrected many of the abuses of his age. With it, the half-insane Gillray kept England in a fever of heat of hatred against Napoleon. With it, Philipon, with the famous 'Pear,' drove Louis Phillippe from the French throne. With it, Tenniel brought down the full flood of the British Lion's vengeance upon the Bengal Tiger at the time of the Sepoy Rebellion. With it, Leech made the whole world shudder when the Russian Czar died in 1855. With it, Nast drew tens of thousands of volunteers to the flag, and won President Lincoln's commendation of his pictures as 'the best recruiting sergeant on the side of the Union.' With it, after Ledau, Daumier solidified

the French Republic by painting the extent of the disaster which the Empire had brought. With it, Du Maurier laughed the aesthetes of London into oblivion. Its power undiminished, it has served to mold the events of history within the memory of the present generation. Old is the saying that the pen is mightier than the sword. But in the nineteenth century the pencil was a swaying force—as it is in the present day."¹²

LIFE

In the waning days of the War, *Life* lost its long time Editor, John Mitchell. Andrew Miller, long time business manager, took over for his fallen partner, but a year and a half later he too was dead. *Life* was placed on the block by the Mitchell estate. The staff, many of whom had been at *Life* for most of their careers, were adamant that the magazine stay in familiar hands. They set up a syndicate and put Gibson at its head. They engaged in a bidding war with Doubleday, running the bid up to \$1001 a share, and walked away the winners. At first, all was well. New talent joined the old standbys. Percy Crosby's *Skippy*, Anton Otto Fischer, and J.C. Leyendecker were regularly featured. A.B. Frost, back from Europe, was convinced to take up the pen again. And John Held chronicled the age of the flapper. Gibson himself was a lesser presence. The Gibson Girl was of the past, and Gibson himself wasn't in tune with the new sensibilities. As time went on, Gibson's lack of native



Original illustration for *Life*, circa 1920s. Ink on paper, 19" x 14.75". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Original Illustration. Ink on paper, 13" x 20.5". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

talent as an editor began to show. Too much democracy in the boardroom and too many conflicting visions. Gibson wasn't willing to hurt feelings or bruise egos. The magazine needed a dictator, and found itself with a diplomat. Even his ability to identify new talent was questionable. He turned down Peter Arno, who would contribute to much of the early success of *The New Yorker*, one of *Life's* new rivals. New directions were tried and abandoned. *Life*, once a den of irreverent satire and social commentary, had become stodgy and conservative in spite of itself. Gibson soldiered on, although the work took a toll on him. He finally arranged a sale for his stake in the magazine to Clare Maxwell and Henry Richter in 1932, and retreated to his home on 700 Acre Island.

THE GOLDEN YEARS

Free from the concerns of running a business, and working with 65 years of artistic experience, Gibson gave himself over to the canvas and took up the paintbrush again. He painted landscapes and portraits, and his children and grandchildren became subjects. In 1934, the Academy of Arts and Letters invited him to exhibit. The show consisted of a retrospective of his pen and ink work in two smaller rooms, and a larger exhibit hall with more than 80 paintings. A review for the *New York Times* opined:

"One approaches this exhibition prepared to renew ones acquaintance with the famous 'Gibson Girl' of

yesteryear and with other celebrated creations of this adventurous pen. They are, indeed, all there, bringing the long-ago most vividly back to us. However, few are likely to be prepared for the spectacle provided by nearly a hundred paintings, a large part of them produced within the last two or three years, by an artist who recently passed his sixty-seventh birthday. Never before, so far as I know, has Charles Dana Gibson held a painting show. We do not all associate his name with canvas and brush. The surprise thus afforded is considerable; but it becomes enhanced as, crossing the threshold of so amazing a demonstration of inextinguishable youth, one goes about the gallery, impelled, step by step, to recognition of a talent audacious in its attack, absolutely undaunted by any painting problem that might present itself, and technically equipped to carry many an exploit through with real distinction. Make no mistake about it. Charles Dana Gibson is a painter. He proves it again and again in a way the visitor is not likely soon to forget. This is scarcely the gesture of a first-rate black and white artist who tentatively tries his hand in another medium, just as a lark, or to see if he can manage a surprise come-back. This is really painting. The exuberance, the blithe letting go, is persuasively reinforced by an intelligent, though not infallible, knowledge of craft. The technique preferred, and for the most part employed, is one that makes



Original illustration. Ink on paper. Photo courtesy of Illustration House, NY



Original illustration. Ink on paper, 22" x 15". Photo courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

heavy inroads upon the paint dealer's supply of material. It is an impasto technique. Pigment lathers the canvas with what often looks like prodigal abandon. But there is method in this loading; an impetuous procedure that as a rule justifies itself and leaves the subject robustly articulate." ¹³

Gibson continued to reside and paint at 700 Acre Island until 1944, when he suffered a heart attack. By order of the President, a Navy plane evacuated the artist to a hospital in New York. Charles Dana Gibson died several weeks later.

THE GIBSON LEGACY

The impact of the 'Gibson Girl' on her society was tectonic. Women, once relegated to front porches and sitting rooms in 'polite society,' were given a role model who played tennis, swam in the surf, rode bicycles, and took control of the environment around her. Gibson even suggested in a tongue in cheek fashion that she would soon be on the Gridiron playing football with the boys. She was the vehicle of social progress for her sex, and only the stodgiest didn't want to come along for the ride. Without her, would there have been Suffragettes? Every man wanted her, and every woman wanted to be her. She was dramatized into plays, serenaded in popular ballads, and found on plates, pillows, posters, and magazine covers. And her creator was a celebrity in his own right. Imitated by thousands, loved by millions, and respected by his peers. Even the Kaiser was said to have a collection of Gibson illustrated books. Charles Dana Gibson was a leader in his field, long time President of its Society, and a patriot. 🍷

— by R. Gary Land, 2015

R. Gary Land is a long time collector of comic book and illustration art. A graduate of Hope College, he lives with his wife and three sons in Hudsonville, Michigan. He is also the list owner of Comcart-L, an original art discussion group on Yahoo Groups, with over 3000 members.

Special thanks to Heritage Auctions, Ha.com, and Illustration House, NY, for images used in this article.

NOTES:

- 1 Fairfax, Downey. *Portrait of an Era as Drawn by C.D. Gibson*. New York: Scribner's, 1936. 18.
- 2 Downey. 12-13.
- 3 Downey. 12-13.
- 4 Downey. 53-54.
- 5 Downey. 84.
- 6 Downey. 86.
- 7 Knowlton, Josephine Gibson. *Butter Balls and Finger Bowls*. Rhode Island: Oxford Press, 1960. 18-20.
- 8 Knowlton. 11.
- 9 Downey. 178-179.
- 10 Downey. 232.
- 11 Downey. 242.
- 12 Downey. 338.
- 13 Downey. 371-372.



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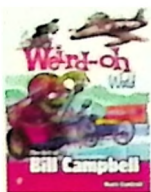
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New and Notable:



A WEIRD-OH WORLD: THE ART OF BILL CAMPBELL

BY MARK CANTRELL
192 PAGES, FULL COLOR
\$39.99, SOFTCOVER
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING, 2014

You may recall Bill Campbell's work from *Illustration* #12, but if you never saw that particular issue, you're almost sure to have seen the strange and wonderful "Weird-Ohs" model kits Campbell designed in the 1960s. This new softcover book is an extensive overview of the career of this colorful artist, and features over 700 illustrations from Bill's early days painting model box tops for the Hawk Model Company, to his invention of the iconic Weird-Ohs model kits. The book also features his work for national ad campaigns, editorial cartoons, his fine art, and designs for Weird-Ohs models that never reached final production. Much of the art is presented here for the very first time.



THE COLLECTOR'S BOOK OF VIRGIL FINLAY

BY ROBERT WEINBERG, DOUGLAS ELLIS,
AND ROBERT GARCIA
208 PAGES, BLACK AND WHITE AND COLOR
\$125.00 HARDCOVER
AMERICAN FANTASY PRESS, 2014

Virgil Finlay was one of the most accomplished line artists working in the genres of science fiction and fantasy. From 1936 to 1971, he illustrated an astounding amount of pulp fiction. His wonderfully detailed interior art appeared in 62 issues of *Weird Tales*, and he painted 19 covers. (His run only ended when the magazine ceased publication in 1954.) For years afterward, his illustrations appeared in *Amazing*, *Strange Stories*, *Fantastic Universe*, *IF*, *Galaxy*, and many more. While he passed away in 1971, in 2012 Virgil Finlay was posthumously inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame. This new collection, the first in about 20 years, contains some of the finest reproductions of his work to date, with most illustrations printed at their original size. The book also includes an extensive gallery of his color work, most often omitted in previous volumes of his art.



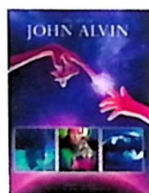
HEROES OF THE COMICS: PORTRAITS OF THE PIONEERING LEGENDS OF COMIC BOOKS

BY DREW FRIEDMAN
184 PAGES, FULL COLOR
\$34.99 HARDCOVER
FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS, 2014

For a number of years now, Drew Friedman has been creating a fantastic series of books in which he renders intricate and

amusing watercolor portraits of some of his favorite figures from popular culture—notably old Jewish comedians, and sideshow freaks. Drew has now decided to turn his attention to another group of interesting old characters, famous and often not-so-famous cartoonists: the men and women who created superheroes, *MAD* magazine, and much more.

This book features over 80 full-color portraits of the pioneering legends of the American comic book, including publishers, editors and artists from the industry's birth in the '30s, through the brilliant artists and writers of EC Comics in the '50s. All of the portraits are chosen and lovingly rendered by Friedman in his inimitable "warts and all" style. Featuring figures popular and obscure, each subject features a short essay by Friedman, who grew up knowing many of the artists included—guys like Stan Lee, Harvey Kurtzman, Jack Davis, Will Elder, and Bill Gaines. Other names you might recognize: Crumb, Wood, Wolverton, Frazetta, Kirby, Cole, Ditko... the book is a veritable Hall of Fame of comic book history.



THE ART OF JOHN ALVIN

BY ANDREA ALVIN
160 PAGES, FULL COLOR
\$34.95, HARDCOVER
TITAN BOOKS, 2014

John Alvin said that as a child he eagerly anticipated the arrival of the Sunday paper, so that he could peruse the ads for all of the new movies playing at the local theaters. He was enamored with the magic of movies, and would create art inspired by his love of film for the rest of his life.

Alvin's career began in 1974, with his creation of the iconic movie poster for Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*. The success of this campaign led to Alvin creating the images for numerous other Brooks' films, including *Young Frankenstein*. His prominence in the medium was firmly established with his creation of the movie posters for Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, Steven Spielberg's *E.T.—The Extra-Terrestrial*, and Blake Edwards' *Victor/Victoria*. Some other iconic images include the posters for *The Goonies*, *Hook*, *Aladdin*, and more. In all, Alvin created the posters for over 135 movies in a 35 year career.

John Alvin passed away in 2008 at the age of 59. In his most recent work, he continued to create iconic images for contemporary films like the *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series.



THE ART OF PIN-UP

EDITED BY DIAN HANSON, WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY
SARAHJANE BLUM AND LOUIS MEISEL
546 PAGES, FULL COLOR
\$200.00, HARDCOVER
TASCHEN BOOKS, 2014

In the 15 years since Taschen Books released *The Great American Pin-up*, international interest in this distinctly American art form has increased exponentially. Paintings by leading pin-up artists such as Alberto Vargas, George Petty, and Gil Elvgren that sold for \$2,000 in 1996 are going for \$200,000 and more today.

The Art of Pin-up is a monumental tome that will be coveted by even the most jaded pin-up collectors. The lavish format and gigantic size (19 x 13 x 3 inches!) more than make up for any overlap existing between any previous books on the subject. The top 10 pin-up artists are profiled in depth. Each chapter opens with a tipped-in reproduction of an original calendar or magazine cover by that artist, printed on a waterproof and untearable plastic sheet. The reproduction quality of the paintings, pastels, and preparatory sketches that follow—largely sourced from the original art—invites the viewer to trace the brush strokes, while the exquisite period calendars, vintage prints, and original model photos document the artists' creative process. Much of these ephemera were photographed on-site at the historic Brown & Bigelow Company, home to the world's largest archive of vintage pin-up calendars.

In addition to the chapters on the 10 featured artists, the book includes brief biographies and the work of 85 additional artists. Weighing in at a whopping 15 pounds, this is one of the most impressive books ever produced on the subject of American illustration art. I can only hope that similarly lavish volumes will be someday be produced on other great illustrators, such as Norman Rockwell or J.C. Leyendecker.



DOROTHY AND OTIS: DESIGNING THE AMERICAN DREAM

BY NORMAN HATHAWAY AND DAN NADEL
256 PAGES, FULL COLOR
\$50.00, HARDCOVER
HARPER DESIGN, 2014

This beautifully designed full-color collection showcases the work of Dorothy and Otis Shepard, two groundbreaking giants of early 20th century American advertising. The book chronicles their story in detail for the first time. It explores the Shepards' penchant for abstraction and modernism, and shows how the advent of billboard advertising inspired their creativity—large campaigns that matched the grandeur of their lifestyle. Throughout, it demonstrates how their influence touched all aspects of consumer culture—from collaborating on the packaging for Wrigley's Gum and designing uniforms and logos for the Chicago Cubs, to planning and promoting the resort island Catalina, where Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Clark Gable, and other celebrities frequented.

The book illuminates their personal lives as well, from their origins and early years, to the eventual dissolution of their marriage. As it brings to life these pioneering artists and their momentous partnership, it elevates them to their rightful place in popular culture and makes clear how their legendary work reflected and exemplified the American Dream. 🍷



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EXHIBITIONS & EVENTS

A Renaissance Man:

The Art of Fred Marcellino

June 30 through October 29, 2015

The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, MA

This exhibition comprises over 90 works and shows the full range of Marcellino's talent, from youthful Abstract-Expressionism through record cover and book jacket design to the crowning achievements of his career—illustrations for children's books. As he noted about his picture-book art, "each picture is a link in a chain, and they all exist in counterpoint with the text. And although you want each picture to have impact, just like a jacket, the book illustration can also be much more subtle. It can be pondered and savored over a period of time. It's a very different discipline from what I was used to, but I must say it was love at first sight." Of special focus will be the art for *Puss in Boots* (1990), for which he won a Caldecott Honor award. The exhibition coincides with the 25th anniversary of the book's publication. A 48-page soft-cover book by Nicholas Falletta, *The Art of Fred Marcellino*, will accompany the exhibition.

For more information, visit: www.carlemuseum.org

The Puzzling World of John Sloan

June 6 through September 6, 2015

The Delaware Art Museum, DE

Between 1900 and 1910, John Sloan produced a weekly series of word and picture puzzles for the Sunday supplement of the *Philadelphia Press*, one of the country's leading illustrated newspapers. *The Puzzling World of John Sloan* will explore this little-known facet of Sloan's early newspaper career, presenting more than 25 works from the Museum's collection. On view for the first time, the puzzles demonstrate the artist's imagination and verbal and visual wit, as well as the fluid boundaries between fine art and newspaper illustration in the first decade of the 20th century. This exhibition encourages visitors to solve Sloan's complex puzzles.

For more information, visit: www.delart.org

J.C. Leyendecker and the Saturday Evening Post

March 21 through June 14, 2015

The Norman Rockwell Museum, MA

Admired by Norman Rockwell as a master in the field, Joseph Christian Leyendecker (1874–1951) was one of the preeminent American illustrators of the early 20th century. Often remembered for his beautifully conceived posters and advertisements—particularly those featuring

The Arrow Collar Man—he also created 322 covers for the *Saturday Evening Post*, a number that would be later matched by Rockwell himself. This special exhibition features each of J.C. Leyendecker's legendary *Post* cover tearsheets. Gifted to the Norman Rockwell Museum by William Hargreaves, they are testament to the artist's exceptional vision, dedication, and skill. Leyendecker's *Post* covers reflect the social and cultural history of his times, featuring such memorable characters as his popular New Year's Baby, Santa Claus, and the stylish men and women who became his hallmark. A selection of original paintings by the artist will also be on view.

For more information, visit: nrm.org

Golden Legacy: Original Art from 65 Years of Golden Books

June 1 through August 15, 2015

Provo Public Library, UT

This exhibition will present the most extensive public showing ever of original illustration art from American publishing's best loved and most consequential picture-book series, Little Golden Books.

Launched in 1942, Little Golden Books made high quality illustrated books available at affordable prices. This show features 60 masterpieces of original illustration art by such artists as Gustaf Tenggren, Martin Provensen, Eloise Wilkin, Richard Scarry, Hilary Knight, and Mary Blair—chosen from the vast Random House archives—and includes examples from such picture-book classics as *The Poky Little Puppy*, *Tootle*, *Home for a Bunny*, *The Kitten Who Thought He Was a Mouse*, *The Color Kittens*, *I Can Fly*, and more. 🍷

For more information, visit: nccil.org

Know of any upcoming exhibitions or events related to the world of classic illustration? Email: illomag@gmail.com

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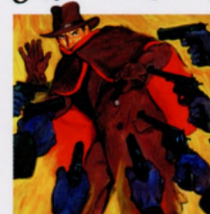
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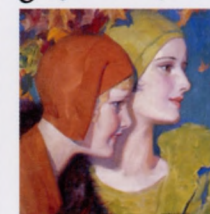
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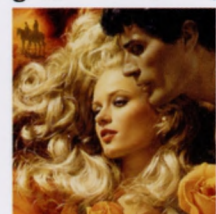
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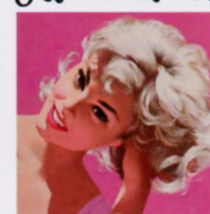
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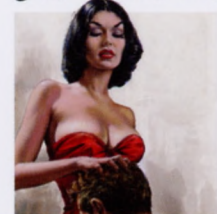
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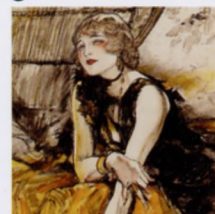
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